

THE
BODLEY HEAD
FORD MADOX
FORD

edited and introduced by
Graham Greene

VOLUME FOUR

Parade's End

Part II No More Parades

Part III A Man Could Stand Up

Volumes III and IV of The Bodley Head Ford Madox Ford continue the cycle of Ford's major works with what is probably his best known novel, *Parade's End* – consisting of *Some do Not . . .*, *No More Parades* and *A Man Could Stand Up*. These books – sometimes referred to as the Tietjens saga, after the name of the principal character – were originally published separately, between 1924 and 1928. They appear here for the first time in this country as a simultaneous publication. Graham Greene explains in his introduction why he has omitted the fourth novel of the series, *Last Post*.

In this great novel Ford employed his immense technical skill to depict, in all its tragic human implications, the collapse of a whole world in the cataclysm of the first World War. The values of the ordered, predictable, hierarchic society of pre-1914 are embodied in Christopher Tietjens – 'the last English Tory' – who lives through the horrors of the war and the shattering of his own world but remains steadfast. Contrasted with him and portrayed with equal clarity and depth is his wife Sylvia – beautiful, arrogant, reckless, morally chaotic, a symbol of the new times – who persecutes him compulsively because to her his calmness and sanity stand as a reproach. As a chronicle of a family and an era *Parade's End* makes most others of the genre seem superficial. As a novel of character it is a work of amazing subtlety and profundity.

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VOLUME IV

PARADE'S END

PART TWO: NO MORE PARADES

PART THREE: A MAN COULD STAND UP



THE BODLEY HEAD

LONDON

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No More Parades, 1925

A Man Could Stand Up, 1926

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NO MORE PARADES

PART ONE

I

WHEN you came in the space was desultory, rectangular, warm after the drip of the winter night, and transfused with a brown-orange dust that was light. It was shaped like the house a child draws. Three groups of brown limbs spotted with brass took dim high-lights from shafts that came from a bucket pierced with holes, filled with incandescent coke, and covered in with a sheet of iron in the shape of a tunnel. Two men, as if hierarchically smaller, crouched on the floor beside the brazier; four, two at each end of the hut, drooped over tables in attitudes of extreme indifference. From the eaves above the parallelogram of black that was the doorway fell intermittent drippings of collected moisture, persistent, with glass-like intervals of musical sound. The two men squatting on their heels over the brazier—they had been miners—began to talk in a low sing-song of dialect, hardly audible. It went on and on, monotonously, without animation. It was as if one told the other long, long stories to which his companion manifested his comprehension or sympathy with animal grunts. . . .

An immense tea-tray, august, its voice filling the black circle of the horizon, thundered to the ground. Numerous pieces of sheet-iron said, 'Pack. Pack. Pack.' In a minute the clay floor of the hut shook, the drums of ears were pressed inwards, solid noise showered about the universe, enormous echoes pushed these men—to the right, to the left, or down towards the tables, and crackling like that of flames among vast underwood became the settled condition of the night. Catching the light from the brazier as the head leaned over, the lips of one of the two men on the

floor were incredibly red and full and went on talking and talking. . . .

The two men on the floor were Welsh miners, of whom the one came from the Rhondda Valley and was unmarried; the other, from Pontardulais, had a wife who kept a laundry, he having given up going underground just before the war. The two men at the table to the right of the door were sergeants-major; the one came from Suffolk and was a time-serving man of sixteen years' seniority as a sergeant in a line regiment. The other was Canadian of English origin. The two officers at the other end of the hut were captains, the one a young regular officer born in Scotland but educated at Oxford; the other, nearly middle-aged and heavy, came from Yorkshire, and was in a militia battalion. The one runner on the floor was filled with a passionate rage because the elder officer had refused him leave to go home and see why his wife, who had sold their laundry, had not yet received the purchase money from the buyer; the other was thinking about a cow. His girl, who worked on a mountain farm above Caerphilly, had written to him about a queer cow: a black-and-white Holstein—surely to goodness a queer cow. The English sergeant-major was almost tearfully worried about the enforced lateness of the draft. It would be twelve midnight before they could march them off. It was not right to keep men hanging about like that. The men did not like to be kept waiting, hanging about. It made them discontented. They did not like it. He could not see why the depot quarter-master could not keep up his stock of candles for the hooded lamps. The men had no call to be kept waiting, hanging about. Soon they would have to be having some supper. Quarter would not like that. He would grumble fair. Having to indent for suppers. Put his account out, fair, it would. Two thousand nine hundred and ninety-four suppers at a penny half-penny. But it was not right to keep the men hanging about till midnight and no suppers. It made them discontented and them going up the line for the first time, poor devils.

The Canadian sergeant-major was worried about a pig-

skin leather pocket-book. He had bought it at the ordnance depot in the town. He imagined himself bringing it out on parade, to read out some return or other to the adjutant. Very smart it would look on parade, himself standing up straight and tall. But he could not remember whether he had put it in his kitbag. On himself it was not. He felt in his right and left breast pockets, his right and left skirt pockets, in all the pockets of his overcoat that hung from a nail within reach of his chair. He did not feel at all certain that the man who acted as his batman had packed that pocket-book with his kit, though he declared he had. It was very annoying. His present wallet, bought in Ontario, was bulging and split. He did not like to bring it out when Imperial officers asked for something out of a return. It gave them a false idea of Canadian troops. Very annoying. He was an auctioneer. He agreed that at this rate it would be half-past one before they had the draft down to the station and entrained. But it was very annoying to be uncertain whether that pocket-book was packed or not. He had imagined himself making a good impression on parade, standing up straight and tall, taking out that pocket-book when the adjutant asked for a figure from one return or the other. He understood their adjutants were to be Imperial officers now they were in France. It was very annoying.

An enormous crashing sound said things of an intolerable intimacy to each of those men, and to all of them as a body. After its mortal vomiting all the other sounds appeared a rushing silence, painful to ears in which the blood audibly coursed. The young officer stood violently up on his feet and caught at the complications of his belt hung from a nail. The elder, across the table, lounging sideways, stretched out one hand with a downward movement. He was aware that the younger man, who was the senior officer, was just upon out of his mind. The younger man, intolerably fatigued, spoke sharp, injurious, inaudible words to his companion. The elder spoke sharp, short words, inaudible too, and continued to motion downwards with his hand over the table. The old English sergeant-major said to his

junior that Captain Mackenzie had one of his mad fits again, but what he said was inaudible and he knew it. He felt arising in his motherly heart that yearned at the moment over his two thousand nine hundred and thirty-four nurslings a necessity, like a fatigue, to extend the motherliness of his functions to the orfcer. He said to the Canadian that Captain Mackenzie there going temporary off his nut was the best orfcer in His Majesty's army. And going to make a bleedin' fool of hisself. The best orfcer in His Majesty's army. Not a better. Careful, smart, brave as a 'ero. And considerate of his men in the line. You wouldn't believe. . . . He felt vaguely that it was a fatigue to have to mother an officer. To a lance-corporal, or a young sergeant, beginning to go wrong you could mutter wheezy suggestions through your moustache. But to an officer you had to say things slantways. Difficult it was. Thank God they had a trustworthy cool hand in the other captain. Old and good, the proverb said.

Dead silence fell.

'Lost the —, they 'ave,' the runner from the Rhondda made his voice startlingly heard. Brilliant illuminations flickered on hut-gables visible through the doorway.

'No reason,' his mate from Pontardulais rather whined in his native sing-song, 'why the bleedin' searchlights, surely to goodness, should light us up for all the — 'Un planes to see. I want to see my bleedin' little 'ut on the bleedin' Mumbles again, if they don't.'

'Not so much swear words, O Nine Morgan,' the sergeant-major said.

'Now, Dai Morgan, I'm telling you,' o9 Morgan's mate continued. 'A queer cow it must have been whatever. Black-and-white Holstein it wass. . . .'

It was as if the younger captain gave up listening to the conversation. He leant both hands on the blanket that covered the table. He exclaimed:

'Who the hell are you to give me orders? I'm your senior. Who the hell . . . Oh, by God, who the hell . . . Nobody gives me orders . . .' His voice collapsed weakly in his chest.

He felt his nostrils to be inordinately dilated so that the air pouring into them was cold. He felt that there was an entangled conspiracy against him, and all round him. He exclaimed: 'You and your —— pimp of a general...!' He desired to cut certain throats with a sharp trench-knife that he had. That would take the weight off his chest. The 'Sit down' of the heavy figure lumping opposite him paralysed his limbs. He felt an unbelievable hatred. If he could move his hand to get at his trench-knife...

09 Morgan said: 'The ——'s name who's bought my bleedin' laundry is Williams. ... If I thought it was Evans Williams of Castell Goch, I'd desert.'

'Took a hatred for it cawve,' the Rhondda man said. 'And look you, before you could say ...' The conversation of orfcers was a thing to which they neither listened. Officers talked of things that had no interest. Whatever could possess a cow to take a hatred of its calf? Up behind Caerphilly on the mountains? On an autumny morning the whole hillside was covered with spider-webs. They shone down the sun like spun glass. Overlooked the cow must be.

The young captain leaning over the table began a long argument as to relative seniority. He argued with himself, taking both sides in an extraordinarily rapid gabble. He himself had been gazetted after Gheluvelt. The other not till a year later. It was true the other was in permanent command of that depot, and he himself attached to the unit only for rations and discipline. But that did not include orders to sit down. What the hell, he wanted to know, did the other mean by it? He began to talk, faster than ever, about a circle. When its circumference came whole by the disintegration of the atom the world would come to an end. In the millennium there would be no giving or taking orders. Of course he obeyed orders till then.

To the elder officer, burdened with the command of a unit of unreasonable size, with a scratch headquarters of useless subalterns who were continually being changed, with N.C.O.'s all unwilling to work, with rank and file

nearly all colonials and unused to doing without things, and with a depot to draw on that, being old established, felt that it belonged exclusively to a regular British unit and resented his drawing anything at all, the practical difficulties of his everyday life were already sufficient, and he had troublesome private affairs. He was lately out of hospital; the sackcloth hut in which he lived, borrowed from the Depot medical officer who had gone to England on leave, was suffocatingly hot with the paraffin heater going, and intolerably cold and damp without it; the batman whom the M.O. had left in charge of the hut appeared to be half-witted. These German air-raids had lately become continuous. The Base was packed with men, tighter than sardines. Down in the town you could not move in the streets. Draft-finding units were commanded to keep their men out of sight as much as possible. Drafts were to be sent off only at night. But how could you send off a draft at night when every ten minutes you had two hours of lights out for an air-raid? Every man had nine sets of papers and tags that had to be signed by an officer. It was quite proper that the poor devils should be properly documented. But how was it to be done? He had two thousand nine hundred and ninety-four men to send off that night and nine times two thousand nine hundred and ninety-four is twenty-six thousand nine hundred and forty-six. They would not or could not let him have a disc-punching machine of his own, but how was the Depot armourer to be expected to punch five thousand nine hundred and eighty-eight extra identity discs in addition to his regular jobs?

The other captain rambled on in front of him. Tietjens did not like his talk of the circle and the millennium. You get alarmed, if you have any sense, when you hear that. It may prove the beginnings of definite, dangerous lunacy. . . . But he knew nothing about the fellow. He was too dark and good-looking, too passionate, probably, to be a good regular officer on the face of him. But he *must* be a good officer: he had the D.S.O. with a clasp, the M.C., and some foreign ribbon up. And the general said he was: with the

additional odd piece of information that he was a Vice-Chancellor's Latin Prize man. . . . He wondered if General Campion knew what a Vice-Chancellor's Latin Prize man was. Probably he did not, but had just stuck the piece of information into his note as a barbaric ornament is used by a savage chief. Wanted to show that he, General Lord Edward Campion, was a man of culture. There was no knowing where vanity would not break out.

So this fellow was too dark and good-looking to be a good officer: yet he *was* a good officer. That explained it. The repressions of the passionate drive them mad. He must have been being sober, disciplined, patient, absolutely repressed ever since 1914—against a background of hell-fire, row, blood, mud, old tins. . . . And indeed the elder officer had a vision of the younger as if in a design for a full-length portrait—for some reason with his legs astride, against a background of tapestry scarlet with fire and more scarlet with blood. . . . He sighed a little; that was the life of all those several millions. . . .

He seemed to see his draft: two thousand nine hundred and ninety-four men he had had command of for over a couple of months—a long space of time as that life went—men he and Sergeant-Major Cowley had looked after with a great deal of tenderness, superintending their morale, their morals, their feet, their digestions, their impatiences, their desires for women. . . . He seemed to see them winding away over a great stretch of country, the head slowly settling down, as in the Zoo you will see an enormous serpent slowly sliding into its water-tank. . . . Settling down out there, a long way away, up against that impassable barrier that stretched from the depths of the ground to the peak of heaven. . . .

Intense dejection: endless muddles: endless follies: endless villainies. All these men given into the hands of the most cynically care-free intriguers in long corridors who made plots that harrowed the hearts of the world. All these men toys: all these agonies mere occasions for picturesque phrases to be put into politicians' speeches without heart

or even intelligence. Hundreds of thousands of men tossed here and there in that sordid and gigantic mud-brownness of mid-winter . . . By God, exactly as if they were nuts wilfully picked up and thrown over the shoulder by magpies. . . . But men. Not just populations. Men you worried over there. Each man a man with a backbone, knees, breeches, braces, a rifle, a home, passions, fornications, drunks, pals, some scheme of the universe, corns, inherited diseases, a greengrocer's business, a milk walk, a paper stall, brats, a slut of a wife. . . . The Men: the Other Ranks! And the poor — little officers. God help them. Vice-Chancellor's Latin Prize men. . . .

This particular poor — Prize man seemed to object to noise. They ought to keep the place quiet for him. . . .

By God, he was perfectly right. That place was meant for the quiet and orderly preparation of meat for the shambles. Drafts! A Base is a place where you meditate: perhaps you should pray: a place where in peace the Tommies should write their last letters home and describe 'ow the guns are 'owling 'orribly.

But to pack a million and a half of men into and round that small town was like baiting a trap for rats with a great chunk of rotten meat. The Hun planes could smell them from a hundred miles away. They could do more harm there than if they bombed a quarter of London to pieces. And the air defences there were a joke: a mad joke. They popped off, thousands of rounds, from any sort of pieces of ordnance, like schoolboys bombarding swimming rats with stones. Obviously your best-trained air-defence men would be round your metropolis. But this was no joke for the sufferers.

Heavy depression settled down more heavily upon him. The distrust of the home Cabinet, felt by then by the greater part of that army, became like physical pain. These immense sacrifices, this ocean of mental sufferings, were all undergone to further the private vanities of men who amidst these hugenesses of landscapes and forces appeared pygmies! It was the worries of all these wet millions in

mud-brown that worried him. They could die, they could be massacred, by the quarter million, in shambles. But that they should be massacred without jauntiness, without confidence, with depressed brows: without parade. . . .

He knew really nothing about the officer in front of him. Apparently the fellow had stopped for an answer to some question. What question? Tietjens had no idea. He had not been listening. Heavy silence settled down on the hut. They just waited. The fellow said with an intonation of hatred:

‘Well, what about it? That’s what I want to know!’

Tietjens went on reflecting. . . . There were a great many kinds of madness. What kind was this? The fellow was not drunk. He talked like a drunkard, but he was not drunk. In ordering him to sit down Tietjens had just chanced it. There are madmen whose momentarily subconscious selves will respond to a military command as if it were magic. Tietjens remembered having barked: ‘About . . . turn,’ to a poor little lunatic fellow in some camp at home and the fellow who had been galloping hotfoot past his tent, waving a naked bayonet with his pursuers fifty yards behind, had stopped dead and faced about with a military stamp like a guardsman. He had tried it on this lunatic for want of any better expedient. It had apparently functioned intermittently. He risked saying:

‘What about what?’

The man said as if ironically:

‘It seems as if I were not worth listening to by your high and mightiness. I said: “What about my foul squirt of an uncle?” Your filthy, best friend.’

Tietjens said:

‘The general’s your uncle? General Campion? What’s he done to you?’

The general had sent this fellow down to him with a note asking him, Tietjens, to keep an eye in his unit on a very good fellow and an admirable officer. The chit was in the general’s own writing, and contained the additional information as to Captain Mackenzie’s scholastic prowess. . . . It had struck Tietjens as queer that the general should take

so much trouble about a casual infantry company commander. How could the fellow have been brought markedly to his notice? Of course, Campion was good-natured, like another man. If a fellow, half dotty, whose record showed that he was a very good man, was brought to his notice Campion would do what he could for him. And Tietjens knew that the general regarded himself, Tietjens, as a heavy, bookish fellow, able reliably to look after one of his protégés. . . . Probably Campion imagined that they had no work to do in that unit: they might become an acting lunatic ward. But if Mackenzie was Campion's nephew the thing was explained.

The lunatic exclaimed:

'Campion, *my* uncle? Why, he's *yours*!'

Tietjens said:

'Oh no, he isn't.' The general was not even a connection of his, but he did happen to be Tietjens' godfather and his father's oldest friend.

The other fellow answered:

'Then it's damn funny. *Damn* suspicious. . . . Why should he be so interested in you if he's not your filthy uncle? You're no soldier. . . . You're no sort of a soldier. . . . A meal sack, that's what you look like. . . .' He paused and then went on very quickly: 'They say up at H.Q. that your wife has got hold of the disgusting general. I didn't believe it was true. I didn't believe you were that sort of fellow. I've heard a lot about you!'

Tietjens laughed at this madness. Then, in the dark brownness, an intolerable pang went all through his heavy frame—the intolerable pang of home news to these desperately occupied men, the pain caused by disasters happening in the darkness and at a distance. You could do nothing to mitigate them! . . . The extraordinary beauty of the wife from whom he was separated—for she was extraordinarily beautiful!—might well have caused scandals about her to have penetrated to the general's headquarters, which was a sort of family party! Hitherto there had, by the grace of God, been no scandals. Sylvia Tietjens had

been excruciatingly unfaithful, in the most painful manner. He could not be certain that the child he adored was his own. . . . That was not unusual with extraordinarily beautiful—and cruel!—women. But she had been haughtily circumspect.

Nevertheless, three months ago, they had parted. . . . Or he thought they had parted. Almost complete blankness had descended upon his home life. She appeared before him so extraordinarily bright and clear in the brown darkness that he shuddered: very tall, very fair, extraordinarily fit and clean even. Thoroughbred! In a sheath gown of gold tissue, all illuminated, and her mass of hair, like gold tissue too, coiled round and round in plaits over her ears. The features very clean-cut and thinnish; the teeth white and small; the breasts small; the arms thin, long and at attention at her sides. . . . His eyes, when they were tired, had that trick of reproducing images on their retinas with that extreme clearness, images sometimes of things he thought of, sometimes of things merely at the back of the mind. Well, to-night his eyes were very tired! She was looking straight before her, with a little inimical disturbance of the corners of her lips. She had just thought of a way to hurt terribly his silent personality. . . . The semi-clearness became a luminous blue, like a tiny gothic arch, and passed out of his vision to the right. . . .

He knew nothing of where Sylvia was. He had given up looking at the illustrated papers. She had said she was going into a convent at Birkenhead—but twice he had seen photographs of her. The first showed her merely with Lady Fiona Grant, daughter of the Earl and Countess of Ulleswater—and a Lord Swindon, talked of as next minister for International Finance—a new Business Peer. . . . All three walking straight into the camera in the courtyard of Lord Swindon's castle . . . all three smiling! . . . It announced Mrs Christopher Tietjens as having a husband at the front.

The sting had, however, been in the second picture—in the description of it supplied by the journal! It showed

Sylvia standing in front of a bench in the park. On the bench in profile there extended himself in a guffaw of laughter, a young man in a top hat jammed well on to his head, which was thrown back, his prognathous jaw pointing upwards. The description stated that the picture showed Mrs Christopher Tietjens, whose husband was in hospital at the Front, telling a good story to the son and heir of Lord Birgham! . . . Another of these pestilential, crooked newspaper-owning financial peers . . .

It had struck him for a painful moment whilst looking at the picture in a dilapidated mess anteroom after he had come out of hospital—that, considering the description, the journal had got its knife into Sylvia. . . . But the illustrated papers do not get their knives into society beauties. They are too precious to the photographers. . . . Then Sylvia must have supplied the information; she desired to cause comment by the contrast of her hilarious companions and the statement that her husband was in hospital at the Front. . . . It had occurred to him that she was on the warpath. But he had put it out of his mind. . . . Nevertheless, brilliant mixture as she was, of the perfectly straight, perfectly fearless, perfectly reckless, of the generous, the kind even—and the atrociously cruel, nothing might suit her better than positively to show contempt—no, no contempt! cynical hatred—for her husband, for the war, for public opinion . . . even for the interest of their child! . . . Yet, it came to him, the image of her that he had just seen had been the image of Sylvia, standing at attention, her mouth working a little, whilst she read out the figures beside the bright filament of mercury in a thermometer. . . . The child had had, with measles, a temperature that, even then, he did not dare think of. And—it was at his sister's in Yorkshire, and the local doctor hadn't cared to take the responsibility—he could still feel the warmth of the little mummy-like body; he had covered the head and face with a flannel, for he didn't care for the sight, and lowered the warm, terrible, fragile weight into a shining surface of crushed ice in water. . . . She had stood at attention, the

corners of her mouth moving a little: the thermometer going down as you watched it. . . . So that she mightn't want, in damaging the father, atrociously to damage the child. . . . For there could not be anything worse for a child than to have a mother known as a whore. . . .

Sergeant-Major Cowley was standing beside the table. He said:

'Wouldn't it be a good thing, sir, to send a runner to the depot sergeant cook and tell him we're going to indent for suppers for the draft? We could send the other with the 128's to Quarter. They're neither wanted here for the moment.'

The other captain went on incessantly talking—but about his fabulous uncle, not about Sylvia. It was difficult for Tietjens to get what he wanted said. He wanted the second runner sent to the depot quartermaster with a message to the effect that if G.S. candles for hooded lamps were not provided for the use of his orderly room by return of bearer he, Captain Tietjens, commanding Number XVI Casual Battalion, would bring the whole matter of supplies for his battalion that same night before Base Headquarters. They were all three talking at once: heavy fatalism overwhelmed Tietjens at the thought of the stubbornness showed by the depot quartermaster. The big unit beside his camp was a weary obstinacy of obstruction. You would have thought they would have displayed some eagerness to get his men up into the line. Let alone that the men were urgently needed, the more of his men went the more of *them* stayed behind. Yet they tried to stop his meat, his groceries, his braces, his identification discs, his soldiers' small books. . . . Every imaginable hindrance, and not even self-interested common sense! . . . He managed also to convey to Sergeant-Major Cowley that, as everything seemed to have quieted down, the Canadian sergeant-major had better go and see if everything was ready for falling his draft in. . . . If things remained quiet for another ten minutes, the 'All Clear' might then be expected. . . . He knew that Sergeant-Major Cowley wanted to get the Other

Ranks out of the hut with that captain carrying on like that, and he did not see why the old N.C.O. should not have what he wanted.

It was as if a tender and masculine butler withdrew himself. Cowley's grey walrus moustache and scarlet cheeks showed for a moment beside the brazier, whispering at the ears of the runners, a hand kindly on each of their shoulders. The runners went; the Canadian went. Sergeant-Major Cowley, his form blocking the doorway, surveyed the stars. He found it difficult to realize that the same pin-pricks of light through black manifolding paper as he looked at, looked down also on his villa and his elderly wife at Isleworth beside the Thames above London. He knew it to be the fact, yet it was difficult to realize. He imagined the trams going along the High Street, his missus in one of them with her supper in a string bag on her stout knees. The trams lit up and shining. He imagined her having kippers for supper: ten to one it would be kippers. Her favourites. His daughter was in the W.A.A.C.'s by now. She had been cashier to Parks's, the big butchers in Brentford, and pretty she had used to look in the glass case. Like as if it might have been the British Museum where they had Pharaohs and others in glass cases. . . . There were threshing machines droning away all over the night. He always said they were like threshing machines. . . . Crikey, if only they were! . . . But they might be our own planes, of course. A good welsh rarebit he had had for tea.

In the hut, the light from the brazier having fewer limbs on which to fall, a sort of intimacy seemed to descend, and Tietjens felt himself gain in ability to deal with his mad friend. Captain Mackenzie—Tietjens was not sure that the name was Mackenzie: it had looked something like it in the general's hand—Captain Mackenzie was going on about the wrongs he had suffered at the hands of some fabulous uncle. Apparently at some important juncture the uncle had refused to acknowledge acquaintanceship with the nephew. From that all the misfortunes of the nephew had arisen. . . . Suddenly Tietjens said:

'Look here, pull yourself together. Are you mad? Stark, staring? . . . Or only just play-acting?'

The man suddenly sank down on to the bully-beef case that served for a chair. He stammered a question as to what—what—what Tietjens meant.

'If you let yourself go,' Tietjens said, 'you may let yourself go a tidy sight farther than you want to.'

'You're not a mad doctor,' the other said. 'It's no good your trying to come it over me. I know all about you. I've got an uncle who's done the dirty on me—the dirtiest dirty ever was done on a man. If it hadn't been for him I shouldn't be here now.'

'You talk as if the fellow had sold you into slavery,' Tietjens said.

'He's your closest friend,' Mackenzie seemed to advance as a motive for revenge on Tietjens. 'He's a friend of the general's, too. Of your wife's as well. He's in with every one.'

A few desultory, pleasurable 'pop-op-ops' sounded from far overhead to the left.

'They imagine they've found the Hun again,' Tietjens said. 'That's all right; you concentrate on your uncle. Only don't exaggerate his importance to the world. I assure you you are mistaken if you call him a friend of mine. I have not got a friend in the world.' He added: 'Are you going to mind the noise? If it is going to get on your nerves you can walk in a dignified manner to a dugout, now, before it gets bad. . . .' He called out to Cowley to go and tell the Canadian sergeant-major to get his men back into their shelters if they had come out. Until the 'All Clear' went.

Captain Mackenzie sat himself gloomily down at table.

'Damn it all,' he said, 'don't think I'm afraid of a little shrapnel. I've had two periods solid of fourteen and nine months in the line. I could have got out on to the rotten staff. . . . It's damn it: it's the beastly row. . . . Why isn't one a beastly girl and privileged to shriek? By God, I'll get even with some of them one of these days. . . .'

'Why not shriek?' Tietjens asked. 'You can, for me. No one's going to doubt your courage here.'

Loud drops of rain spattered down all round the hut; there was a familiar thud on the ground a yard or so away, a sharp tearing sound above, a sharper knock on the table between them. Mackenzie took the shrapnel bullet that had fallen and turned it round and round between finger and thumb.

'You think you caught me on the hop just now,' he said injuriously. 'You're damn clever.'

Two stories down below someone let two hundred-pound dumb-bells drop on the drawing-room carpet; all the windows of the house slammed in a race to get it over; the 'pop-op-ops' of the shrapnel went in wafts all over the air. There was again sudden silence that was painful, after you had braced yourself up to bear noise. The runner from the Rhondda came in with a light step bearing two fat candles. He took the hooded lamps from Tietjens and began to press the candles up against the inner springs, snorting sedulously through his nostrils. . . .

'Nearly got me, one of those candlesticks did,' he said. 'Touched my foot as it fell, it did. I did run. Surely to goodness I did run, cahptn.'

Inside the shrapnel shell was an iron bar with a flattened, broad nose. When the shell burst in the air this iron object fell to the ground and, since it came often from a great height, its fall was dangerous. The men called these candlesticks, which they much resembled.

A little ring of light now existed on the puce colour of the blanket-covered table. Tietjens showed, silver-headed, fresh-coloured, and bulky; Mackenzie, dark, revengeful eyes above a prognathous jaw. A very thin man, thirtyish.

'You can go into the shelter with the Colonial troops, if you like,' Tietjens said to the runner. The man answered after a pause, being very slow thinking, that he preferred to wait for his mate, 09 Morgan whatever.

'They ought to let my orderly room have tin hats,' Tietjens said to Mackenzie. 'I'm damned if they didn't take

these fellows' tin hats into store again when they attached to me for service, and I'm equally damned if they did not tell me that, if I wanted tin hats for my own headquarters, I had to write to H.Q. Canadians, Aldershot, or some such place in order to get the issue sanctioned.'

'Our headquarters are full of Huns doing the Huns' work,' Mackenzie said hatefully. 'I'd like to get among them one of these days.'

Tietjens looked with some attention at that young man with the Rembrandt shadows over his dark face. He said:

'Do you believe that tripe?'

The young man said:

'No . . . I don't know that I do. . . . I don't know what to think. . . . The world's rotten. . . .'

'Oh, the world's pretty rotten, all right,' Tietjens answered. And, in his fatigue of mind caused by having to attend to innumerable concrete facts like the providing of households for a thousand men every few days, arranging parades states for an extraordinarily mixed set of troops of all arms with very mixed drills, and fighting the Assistant Provost Marshal to keep his own men out of the clutches of the beastly Garrison Military Police who had got a down on all Canadians, he felt he had not any curiosity at all left. . . . Yet he felt vaguely that, at the back of his mind, there was some reason for trying to cure this young member of the lower middle classes.

He repeated:

'Yes, the world's certainly pretty rotten. But that's not its particular line of rottenness as far as we are concerned. . . . We're tangled up, not because we've got Huns in our orderly rooms, but just because we've got English. That's the bat in our belfry. . . . That Hun plane is presumably coming back. Half a dozen of them. . . .'

The young man, his mind eased by having got off his chest a confounded lot of semi-nonsensical ravings, considered the return of the Hun planes with gloomy indifference. His problem really was: could he stand the — noise that would probably accompany their return? He

had to get really into his head that this was an open space to all intents and purposes. There would not be splinters of stone flying about. He was ready to be hit by iron, steel, lead, copper, or brass shell rims, but not by beastly splinters of stone knocked off house fronts. That consideration had come to him during his beastly, his beastly, his infernal, damnable leave in London, when just such a filthy row had been going on. . . . Divorce leave! . . . Captain McKechnie second attached ninth Glamorganshires is granted leave from the 14/11 to the 29/11 for the purpose of obtaining a divorce. . . . The memory seemed to burst inside him with the noise of one of those beastly enormous tin-pot crashes—and it always came when guns made that particular kind of tin-pot crash: the two came together, the internal one and the crash outside. He felt that chimney-pots were going to crash on to his head. You protected yourself by shouting at damned infernal idiots; if you could out-shout the row you were safe. . . . That was not sensible but you got ease that way! . . .

‘In matters of Information they’re not a patch on us.’ Tietjens tried the speech on cautiously and concluded: ‘We know what the Enemy rulers read in the sealed envelopes beside their breakfast bacon-and-egg plates.’

It had occurred to him that it was a military duty to bother himself about the mental equilibrium of this member of the lower classes. So he talked . . . *any* old talk, wearisomely, to keep his mind employed! Captain MacKenzie was an officer of His Majesty the King: the property, body and soul, of His Majesty and His Majesty’s War Office. It was Tietjens’ duty to preserve this fellow as it was his duty to prevent deterioration in any other piece of the King’s property. That was implicit in the oath of allegiance. He went on talking:

The curse of the army, as far as the organization is concerned, was our imbecile national belief that the game is more than the player. That was our ruin, mentally, as a nation. We were taught that cricket is more than clearness of mind, so the blasted quarter-master, O.C. Depot Ord-

nance Stores next door, thought he had taken a wicket if he refused to serve out tin hats to their crowd. That's the Game! And if any of his, Tietjens', men were killed, he grinned and said the game was more than the players of the game. . . . And of course if he got his bowling average down low enough he got promotion. There was a quartermaster in a west country cathedral city who'd got more D.S.O.'s and combatant medals than anyone on active service in France, from the sea to Peronne, or wherever our lines ended. His achievement was to have robbed almost every wretched Tommie in the Western Command of several weeks' separation allowance . . . for the good of the taxpayer, of course. The poor — Tommies' kids went without proper food and clothing, and the Tommies themselves had been in a state of exasperation and resentment. And nothing in the world was worse for discipline and the army as a fighting machine. But there that quartermaster sat in his office, playing the romantic game over his A.F.B.'s till the broad buff sheets fairly glowed in the light of the incandescent gas. 'And,' Tietjens concluded, 'for every quarter of a million sterling for which he bowls out the wretched fighting men he gets a new clasp on his fourth D.S.O. ribbon. . . . The game, in short, is more than the players of the game.'

'Oh, damn it!' Captain Mackenzie said. 'That's what's made us what we are, isn't it?'

'It is,' Tietjens answered. 'It's got us into the hole and it keeps us there.'

Mackenzie remained dispiritedly looking down at his fingers.

'You may be wrong or you may be right,' he said. 'It's contrary to everything that I ever heard. But I see what you mean.'

'At the beginning of the war,' Tietjens said, 'I had to look in on the War Office, and in a room I found a fellow . . . What do you think he was doing. . . . what the hell do you think he was doing? He was devising the ceremonial for the disbanding of a Kitchener battalion. You can't say

we were not prepared in one matter at least. . . . Well, the end of the show was to be: the adjutant would stand the battalion at ease: the band would play *Land of Hope and Glory*, and then the adjutant would say: *There will be no more parades*. . . . Don't you see how symbolical it was: the band playing *Land of Hope and Glory*, and then the adjutant saying *There will be no more parades*? . . . For there won't. There won't, there damn well won't. . . . No more Hope, no more Glory, no more parades for you and me any more. Nor for the country . . . Nor for the world, I dare say . . . None . . . Gone . . . Na poo, finny! No . . . more . . . parades!'

'I dare say you're right,' the other said slowly. 'But, all the same, what am I doing in this show? I hate soldiering. I hate this whole beastly business. . . .'

'Then why didn't you go on the gaudy Staff?' Tietjens asked. 'The gaudy Staff apparently was yearning to have you. I bet God intended you for Intelligence: not for the footslogging department.'

The other said wearily:

'I don't know. I was with the battalion. I wanted to stop with the battalion. I was intended for the Foreign Office. My miserable uncle got me hoofed out of that. I was with the battalion. The C.O. wasn't up to much. *Someone* had to stay with the battalion. I was not going to do the dirty on it, taking any soft job. . . .'

'I suppose you speak seven languages and all?' Tietjens asked.

'Five,' the other said patiently, 'and read two more. And Latin and Greek, of course.'

A man, brown, stiff, with a haughty parade step, burst into the light. He said with a high wooden voice:

''Ere's another bloomin' casualty.' In the shadow he appeared to have draped half his face and the right side of his breast with crape. He gave a high, rattling laugh. He bent, as if in a stiff bow, woodenly at his thighs. He pitched, still bent, on to the iron sheet that covered the brazier, rolled off that and lay on his back across the legs

of the other runner, who had been crouched beside the brazier. In the bright light it was as if a whole pail of scarlet paint had been dashed across the man's face on the left and his chest. It glistened in the firelight—just like fresh paint, moving! The runner from the Rhondda, pinned down by the body across his knees, sat with his jaw fallen, resembling one girl that should be combing the hair of another recumbent before her. The red viscousness welled across the floor; you sometimes so see fresh water bubbling up in sand. It astonished Tietjens to see that a human body could be so lavish of blood. He was thinking it was a queer mania that that fellow should have, that his uncle was a friend of his, Tietjens. He had no friend in trade, uncle of a fellow who in ordinary times would probably bring you pairs of boots on approval. . . . He felt as he did when you patch up a horse that has been badly hurt. He remembered a horse from a cut on whose chest the blood had streamed down over the off foreleg like a stocking. A girl had lent him her petticoat to bandage it. Nevertheless his legs moved slowly and heavily across the floor.

The heat from the brazier was overpowering on his bent face. He hoped he would not get his hands all over blood, because blood is very sticky. It makes your fingers stick together impotently. But there might not be any blood in the darkness under the fellow's back where he was putting his hand. There was, however: it was very wet.

The voice of Sergeant-Major Cowley said from outside: 'Bugler, call two sanitary lance-corporals and four men. Two sanitary corporals and four men.' A prolonged wailing with interruptions transfused the night, mournful, resigned, and prolonged.

Tietjens thought that, thank God, someone would come and relieve him of that job. It was a breathless affair holding up the corpse with the fire burning his face. He said to the other runner:

'Get out from under him, damn you! Are you hurt?' Mackenzie could not get at the body from the other side

because of the brazier. The runner from under the corpse moved with short sitting shuffles as if he were getting his legs out from under a sofa. He was saying:

‘Poor —— O Nine Morgan! Surely to goodness I did not recognise the pore —— . . . Surely to goodness I did not recognise the pore ——’

Tietjens let the trunk of the body sink slowly to the floor. He was more gentle than if the man had been alive. All hell in the way of noise burst about the world. Tietjens’ thoughts seemed to have to shout to him between earthquake shocks. He was thinking it was absurd of that fellow Mackenzie to imagine that he could know any uncle of his. He saw very vividly also the face of his girl who was a pacifist. It worried him not to know what expression her face would have if she heard of his occupation, now. Disgust? . . . He was standing with his greasy, sticky hands held out from the flaps of his tunic. . . . Perhaps disgust! . . . It was impossible to think in this row. . . . His very thick soles moved guiltily and came up after suction. . . . He remembered he had not sent a runner along to I.B.D. Orderly Room to see how many of his crowd would be wanted for garrison fatigue next day, and this annoyed him acutely. He would have no end of a job warning the officers he detailed. They would all be in brothels down in the town by now. . . . He could not work out what the girl’s expression would be. He was never to see her again, so what the hell did it matter? . . . Disgust, probably! . . . He remembered that he had not looked to see how Mackenzie was getting on in the noise. He did not want to see Mackenzie. He was a bore. . . . How would her face express disgust? He had never seen her express disgust. She had a perfectly undistinguished face. Fair . . . O God, how suddenly his bowels turned over! . . . Thinking of the girl . . . The face below him grinned at the roof—the half face! The nose was there, half the mouth with the teeth showing in the firelight. . . . It was extraordinary how defined the peaked nose and the serrated teeth were in that mess . . . The eye looked jauntily at the peak of the

canvas hut-roof. . . . Gone with a grin. Singular the fellow should have spoken! After he was dead. He must have been dead when he spoke. It had been done with the last air automatically going out of the lungs. A reflex action, probably, in the dead. . . . If he, Tietjens, had given the fellow the leave he wanted he would be alive now! . . . Well, he was quite right not to have given the poor devil his leave. He was, anyhow, better where he was. And so was he, Tietjens. He had not had a single letter from home since he had been out this time! Not a single letter. Not even gossip. Not a bill. Some circulars of old furniture dealers. They never neglected him! They had got beyond the sentimental stage at home. Obviously so. . . . He wondered if his bowels would turn over again if he thought of the girl. He was gratified that they had. It showed that he had strong feelings. . . . He thought about her deliberately. Hard. Nothing happened. He thought of her fair, undistinguished, fresh face that made your heart miss a beat when you thought about it. His heart missed a beat. Obedient heart! Like the first primrose. Not *any* primrose. The *first* primrose. Under a bank with the hounds breaking through the underwood. . . . It was sentimental to say *Du bist wie eine Blume*. . . . Damn the German language! But that fellow was a Jew. . . . One should not say that one's young woman was like a flower, *any* flower. Not even to oneself. That was sentimental. But one might say one special flower. A *man* could say that. A man's job. She smelt like a primrose when you kissed her. But, damn it, he had never kissed her. So how did he know how she smelt! She was a little tranquil, golden spot. He himself must be a ——— eunuch. By temperament. That dead fellow down there must be one, physically. It was probably indecent to think of a corpse as impotent. But he was, very likely. That would be why his wife had taken up with the prize-fighter Red Evans Williams of Castell Goch. If he had given the fellow leave the prize-fighter would have smashed him to bits. The police of Pontardulais had asked that he should not be let come home—because of

the prize-fighter. So he was better dead. Or perhaps not. Is death better than discovering that your wife is a whore and being done in by her cully? *Gwell angau na gwillth*, their own regimental badge bore the words. '*Death is better than dishonour*' . . . No, not death, *angau* means pain. Anguish! Anguish is better than dishonour. The devil it is! Well, that fellow would have got both. Anguish and dishonour. Dishonour from his wife and anguish when the prize-fighter hit him. . . . That was no doubt why his half-face grinned at the roof. The gory side of it had turned brown. Already! Like a mummy of a Pharaoh, *that* half looked. . . . He was born to be a blooming casualty. Either by shell-fire or by the fist of the prize-fighter. . . . Pontardulais! Somewhere in Mid-Wales. He had been through it once in a car, on duty. A long, dull village. Why should anyone want to go back to it? . . .

A tender butler's voice said beside him: 'This isn't your job, sir. Sorry you had to do it. . . . Lucky it wasn't you, sir. . . . This was what done it, I should say.'

Sergeant-Major Cowley was standing beside him holding a bit of metal that was heavy in his hand and like a candle-stick. He was aware that a moment before he had seen the fellow, Mackenzie, bending over the brazier, putting the sheet of iron back. Careful officer, Mackenzie. The Huns must not be allowed to see the light from the brazier. The edge of the sheet had gone down on the dead man's tunic, nipping a bit by the shoulder. The face had disappeared in shadow. There were several men's faces in the doorway.

Tietjens said: 'No: I don't believe that did it. Something bigger. . . . Say a prize-fighter's fist. . . .'

Sergeant-Major Cowley said:

'No, no prize-fighter's fist would have done that, sir. . . .' And then he added, 'Oh, I take your meaning, sir . . . O Nine Morgan's wife, sir. . . .'

Tietjens moved, his feet sticking, towards the sergeant-major's table. The other runner had placed a tin basin with water in it. There was a hooded candle there now, alight; the water shone innocently, a half-moon of trans-

lucence wavering over the white bottom of the basin. The runner from Pontardulais said:

‘Wash your hands first, sir!’

He said:

‘Move a little out of it, cahptn.’ He had a rag in his black hands. Tietjens moved out of the blood that had run in a thin stream under the table. The man was on his knees, his hands rubbing Tietjens’ boot welts heavily, with the rags. Tietjens placed his hands in the innocent water and watched light purple-scarlet mist diffuse itself over the pale half-moon. The man below him breathed heavily, sniffing. Tietjens said:

‘Thomas, O Nine Morgan was your mate?’

The man’s face, wrinkled, dark and ape-like, looked up.

‘He was a good pal, pore old ——,’ he said. ‘You would not like, surely to goodness, to go to mess with your shoes all bloody.’

‘If I had given him leave,’ Tietjens said, ‘he would not be dead now.’

‘No, surely not,’ One Seven Thomas answered. ‘But it is all one. Evans of Castell Goch would surely to goodness have killed him.’

‘So you knew, too, about his wife!’ Tietjens said.

‘We thoct it wass that,’ One Seven Thomas answered, ‘or you would have given him leave, cahptn. You are a good cahptn.’

A sudden sense of the publicity that that life was came over Tietjens.

‘You knew that,’ he said. ‘I wonder what the hell you fellows don’t know and all!’ he thought. ‘If anything went wrong with one it would be all over the command in two days. Thank God, Sylvia can’t get here!’

The man had risen to his feet. He fetched a towel of the sergeant-major’s, very white with a red border.

‘We know,’ he said, ‘that your honour is a very goot cahptn. And Captain McKechnie is a *fery* goot cahptn, and Captain Prentiss, and Le’tennat Jonce of Merthyr . . .’

Tietjens said:

'That'll do. Tell the sergeant-major to give you a pass to go with your mate to the hospital. Get someone to wash this floor.'

Two men were carrying the remains of O Nine Morgan, the trunk wrapped in a ground sheet. They carried him in a bandy chair out of the hut. His arms over his shoulders waved a jocular farewell. There would be an ambulance stretcher on bicycle wheels outside.

II

The 'All Clear' went at once after that. Its suddenness was something surprising, the mournful-cheerful, long notes dying regretfully on a night that had only just gone quiet after the perfectly astonishing row. The moon had taken it into its head to rise; begumboiled, jocular and grotesque, it came from behind the shoulder of one of the hut-covered hills and sent down the lines of Tietjens' huts long, sentimental rays that converted the place into a slumbering, pastoral settlement. There was no sound that did not contribute to the silence, little dim lights shone through the celluloid casements. Of Sergeant-Major Cowley, his numerals gilded by the moon in the lines of A Company, Tietjens, who was easing his lungs of coke vapours for a minute, asked in a voice that hushed itself in tribute to the moonlight and the now keen frost:

'Where the deuce is the draft?'

The sergeant-major looked poetically down a ribbon of whitewashed stones that descended the black down-side. Over the next shoulder of hill was the blur of a hidden conflagration.

'There's a Hun plane burning down there. In Twenty-Seven's parade ground. The draft's round that, sir,' he said.

Tietjens said:

'Good God!' in a voice of caustic tolerance. He added, 'I did think we had drilled some discipline into these blighters in the seven weeks we have had them. . . . You

remember the first time when we had them on parade and that acting lance-corporal left the ranks to heave a rock at a sea-gull. . . . And called you "Oi" Hunkey! . . . Conduct prejudicial to good order and military discipline? Where's that Canadian sergeant-major? Where's the officer in charge of the draft?'

Sergeant-Major Cowley said:

'Sergeant-Major Ledoux said it was like a cattle-stampede on the . . . some river where they come from. You *couldn't* stop them, sir. It was their first German plane. . . . And they going up the line to-night, sir.'

'To-night!' Tietjens exclaimed. 'Next Christmas!'

The sergeant-major said:

'Poor boys!' and continued to gaze into the distance. 'I heard another good one, sir,' he said. 'The answer to the one about the King saluting a private soldier and he not taking any notice is: when he's dead. . . . But if you marched a company into a field through a gateway and you wanted to get it out again but you did not know any command in the drill book for change of direction, what would you do, sir? . . . You have to get that company out, but you must not use About Turn, or Right or Left Wheel. . . . There's another one, too, about saluting. . . . The officer in charge of draft is Second-Lieutenant Hotchkiss. . . . But he's an A.S.C. officer and turned of sixty. A farrier he is, sir, in civil life. An A.S.C. major was asking me, sir, very civil, if you could not detail someone else. He says he doubts if Second Lieutenant Hitchcock . . . Hotchkiss could walk as far as the station, let alone march the men, him not knowing anything but cavalry words of command, if he knows them. He's only been in the army a fortnight. . . .'

Tietjens turned from the idyllic scene with the words:

'I suppose the Canadian sergeant-major and Lieutenant Hotchkiss are doing what they can to get their men come back.'

He re-entered the hut.

Captain Mackenzie in the light of a fantastically brilliant

hurricane lamp appeared to be bathing dejectedly in a surf of coiling papers spread on the table before him.

'There's all this bumph,' he said, 'just come from all the headquarters in the bally world.'

Tietjens said cheerfully:

'What's it all about?' There were, the other answered, Garrison Headquarter orders, Divisional orders, Lines of Communication orders, half a dozen A.F.W.B. two four two's. A terrific strafe from First Army forwarded from Garrison H.Q. about the draft's not having reached Haze-brouck the day before yesterday. Tietjens said:

'Answer them politely to the effect that we had orders not to send off the draft without its complement of four hundred Canadian Railway Service men—the fellows in furred hoods. They only reached us from Etaples at five this afternoon without blankets or ring papers. Or any other papers for the matter of that.'

Mackenzie was studying with increased gloom a small buff memorandum slip:

'This appears to be meant for you privately,' he said. 'I can't make head or tail of it otherwise. It isn't *marked* private.'

He tossed the buff slip across the table.

Tietjens sank down bulkily on to his bully-beef case. He read on the buff at first the initials of the signature, 'E.C. Genl.', and then: 'For God's sake keep your wife off me. I *will* not have skirts round my H.Q. You are more trouble to me than all the rest of my command put together.'

Tietjens groaned and sank more deeply on to his beef case. It was as if an unseen and unsuspected wild beast had jumped on his neck from an over-hanging branch. The sergeant-major at his side said in his most admirable butler manner:

'Colour-Sergeant Morgan and Lance-Corporal Trench are obliging us by coming from depot orderly room to help with the draft's papers. Why don't you and the other officer go and get a bit of dinner, sir? The colonel and the

padre have only just come in to mess, and I've warned the mess orderlies to keep your food 'ot. . . . Both good men with papers, Morgan and Trench. We can send the soldiers' small books to you at table to sign. . . .'

His feminine solicitude enraged and overwhelmed Tietjens with blackness. He told the sergeant-major that he was to go to hell, for he himself was not going to leave that hut till the draft was moved off. Captain Mackenzie could do as he pleased. The sergeant-major told Captain Mackenzie that Captain Tietjens took as much trouble with his rag-time detachments as if he had been the Coldstream adjutant at Chelsea sending off a draft of Guards. Captain Mackenzie said that that was why they damn well got their details off four days faster than any other I.B.D. in that camp. He *would* say that much, he added grudgingly and dropped his head over his papers again. The hut was moving slowly up and down before the eyes of Tietjens. He might have just been kicked in the stomach. That was how shocks took him. He said to himself that by God he must take himself in hand. He grabbed with his heavy hands at a piece of buff paper and wrote on it a column of fat, wet letters

a

b

b

a

a

b

b

a and so on.

He said opprobriously to Captain Mackenzie:

'Do you know what a sonnet is? Give me the rhymes for a sonnet. That's the plan of it.'

Mackenzie grumbled:

'Of course I know what a sonnet is. What's your game?'

Tietjens said:

'Give me the fourteen end-rhymes of a sonnet and I'll write the lines. In under two minutes and a half.'

Mackenzie said injuriously:

'If you do I'll turn it into Latin hexameters in three. In *under* three minutes.'

They were like men uttering deadly insults the one to the other. To Tietjens it was as if an immense cat were parading, fascinated and fatal, round that hut. He had imagined himself parted from his wife. He had not heard from his wife since her four-in-the-morning departure from their flat, months and eternities ago, with the dawn just showing up the chimney-pots of the Georgian roof-trees opposite. In the complete stillness of dawn he had heard her voice say very clearly 'Paddington' to the chauffeur, and then all the sparrows in the inn waking up in chorus. . . . Suddenly and appallingly it came into his head that it might not have been his wife's voice that had said 'Paddington', but her maid's . . . He was a man who lived very much by rules of conduct. He had a rule: *Never think on the subject of a shock at a moment of shock*. The mind was then too sensitized. Subjects of shock require to be thought all round. If your mind thinks when it is too sensitized its then conclusions will be too strong. So he exclaimed to Mackenzie:

'Haven't you got your rhymes yet? Damn it all!'

Mackenzie grumbled offensively:

'No, I haven't. It's more difficult to get rhymes than to write sonnets. . . . death, moil, coil, breath . . .' He paused.

'Heath, soil, toil, staggereth,' Tietjens said contemptuously. 'That's your sort of Oxford young woman's rhyme. . . . Go on . . . *What is it?*'

An extremely age-faded and unmilitary officer was beside the blanketed table. Tietjens regretted having spoken to him with ferocity. He had a grotesquely thin white beard. Positively, white whiskers! He must have gone through as much of the army as he had gone through with those whiskers, because no superior officer—not even a field-marshal—would have the heart to tell him to take them

off! It was the measure of his pathos. This ghost-like object was apologizing for not having been able to keep the draft in hand: he was requesting his superior to observe that these Colonial troops were without any instincts of discipline. None at all. Tietjens observed that he had a blue cross on his right arm where the vaccination marks are as a rule. He imagined the Canadians talking to this hero. . . . The hero began to talk of Major Cornwallis of the R. A. S. C.

Tietjens said apropos of nothing:

'Is there a Major Cornwallis in the A.S.C.? Good God!'

The hero protested faintly:

'The R.A.S.C.'

Tietjens said kindly:

'Yes. Yes. The *Royal Army Service Corps*.'

Obviously his mind until now had regarded his wife's 'Paddington' as the definite farewell between his life and hers. . . . He had imagined her, like Eurydice, tall, but faint and pale, sinking back into the shades. . . . '*Che faro senz* Eurydice? . . . ' he hummed. Absurd! And of course it might have been only the maid that had spoken. . . . She too had a remarkably clear voice. So that the mystic word 'Paddington' might perfectly well be no symbol at all, and Mrs Sylvia Tietjens, far from being faint and pale, might perfectly well be playing the very devil with half the general officers commanding in chief from Whitehall to Alaska.

Mackenzie—he *was* like a damned clerk—was transferring the rhymes that he had no doubt at last found, on to another sheet of paper. Probably he had a round, copy-book hand. Positively, his tongue followed his pen round, inside his lips. These were what His Majesty's regular officers of to-day were. Good God! A damned intelligent, dark-looking fellow. Of the type that is starved in its youth and takes all the scholarships that the board schools have to offer. Eyes too big and black. Like a Malay's. . . . Any blasted member of any subject race.

The A.S.C. fellow had been talking positively about

horses. He had offered his services in order to study the variation of pink-eye that was decimating all the service horses in the lines. He had been a professor—positively a professor—in some farriery college or other. Tietjens said that, in that case, he ought to be in the A.V.C.—the *Royal Army Veterinary Corps* perhaps it was. The old man said he didn't know. He imagined that the R.A.S.C. had wanted his service for their own horses. . . .

Tietjens said:

'I'll tell you what to do, Lieutenant Hitchcock. . . . For, damn it, you're a stout fellow. . . .' The poor old fellow, pushing out at that age from the cloisters of some provincial university. . . . He certainly did not look a horsy sportsman. . . .

The old lieutenant said:

'Hotchkiss. . . .' And Tietjens exclaimed:

'Of course it's Hotchkiss. . . . I've seen your name signing a testimonial to Pigg's Horse Embrocation. . . . Then if you don't want to take this draft up the line. . . . Though I'd advise you to. . . . It's merely a Cook's Tour to Hazebrouck. . . . No, Bailleul. . . . And the sergeant-major will march the men for you. . . . And you will have been in the First Army Lines and able to tell all your friends you've been on active service at the real front. . . .'

His mind said to himself while his words went on. . . .

'Then, good God, if Sylvia is actively paying attention to my career I shall be the laughing-stock of the whole army. I was thinking that ten minutes ago! . . . What's to be done? What in God's name is to be done?' A black crape veil seemed to drop across his vision. . . . Liver. . . .

Lieutenant Hotchkiss said with dignity:

'I'm *going* to the front. I'm going to the real front. I was passed *AT* this morning. I am going to study the blood reactions of the service horse under fire.'

'Well, you're a damn good chap,' Tietjens said. There was nothing to be done. The amazing activities of which Sylvia would be capable were just the thing to send laughter raging like fire through a cachinnating army. She

could not thank God, get into France: to that place. But she could make scandals in the papers that every Tommie read. There was no game of which she was not capable. That sort of pursuit was called 'pulling the strings of shower-baths' in her circle of friends. Nothing. Nothing to be done. . . . The beastly hurricane lamp was smoking.

'I'll tell you what to do,' he said to Lieutenant Hotchkiss.

Mackenzie had tossed his sheet of rhymes under his nose. Tietjens read: *Death, moil, coil, breath . . . Saith—* 'The dirty Cockney!' *Oil, soil, wraith. . . .*

'I'd be blowed,' Mackenzie said with a vicious grin, 'if I was going to give you rhymes you had suggested yourself . . .'

The officer said:

'I don't of course want to be a nuisance if you're busy.'

'It's no nuisance,' Tietjens said. 'It's what we're for. But I'd suggest that now and then you say "sir" to the officer commanding your unit. It sounds well before the men. . . . Now you go to No. XVI I.B.D. Mess ante-room . . . The place where they've got the broken bagatelle-table. . . .'

The voice of Sergeant-Major Cowley exclaimed tranquilly from outside:

'Fall in now. Men who've got their ring papers and identity disks—three of them—on the left. Men who haven't, on the right. Any man who has not been able to draw his blankets tell Colour-Sergeant Morgan. Don't forget. You won't get any where you're going. Any man who hasn't made his will in his Soldier's Small Book or elsewhere and wants to, to consult Captain Tietjens. Any man who wants to draw money, ask Captain Mackenzie. Any R.C. who wants to go to confession after he has got his papers signed can find the R.C. padre in the fourth hut from the left in the Main Line from here. . . . And damn kind it is of his reverence to put himself out for a set of damn blinking mustard-faced red herrings like you who can't keep from running away to the first baby's bonfire you sees. You'll be running the other way before you're a week older, though what good they as asks for

you thinks you'll be out there God knows. You *look* like a squad of infants' companions from a Wesleyan Sunday school. That's what you look like and, thank God, we've got a Navy.'

Under cover of his voice Tietjens had been writing:

'Now we affront the grinning chops of *Death*,' and saying to Lieutenant Hotchkiss: 'In the I.B.D. ante-room you'll find any number of dirty little squits of Glamorgan-shires drinking themselves blind over *La Vie Parisienne*. . . . Ask any one of them you like. . . .' He wrote:

'And in between the carcasses and the *moil*
Of marts and cities, toil and *moil* and *coil*. . .'

'You think this difficult!' he said to Mackenzie. 'Why, you've written a whole undertaker's mortuary ode in the rhymes alone,' and went on to Hotchkiss: 'Ask anyone you like as long as he's a P.B. officer. . . . Do you know what P.B. means? No, not Poor B——y, Permanent Base. Unfit . . . If he'd like to take a draft to Bailleul.'

The hut was filling with devious, slow, ungainly men in yellow-brown. Their feet shuffled desultorily; they lumped dull canvas bags along the floor and held in unliterary hands small open books that they dropped from time to time. From outside came a continuing, swelling and descending chant of voices; at times it would seem to be all one laugh, at times one menace, then the motives mingled fugally, like the sea on a beach of large stones. It seemed to Tietjens suddenly extraordinary how shut in on oneself one was in this life. . . . He sat scribbling fast: 'Old Spectre blows a cold protecting *breath*. . . Vanity of vanities, the preacher *saith*. . . No more parades, not any more, no *oil*. . .' He was telling Hotchkiss, who was obviously shy of approaching the Glamorganshires in their ante-room . . . 'Unambergri'd our limbs in the naked *soil*. . .' that he did not suppose any P.B. officer would object. They would go on a beanfeast up into the giddy line in a first-class carriage and get draft leave and command pay too probably . . . 'No funeral struments cast before our

wraiths . . . ' If any fellow does object, you just send his name to me and I will damn well shove it into extra orders. . . .

The advanced wave of the brown tide of men was already at his feet. The extraordinary complications of even the simplest lives . . . A fellow was beside him . . . Private Logan, formerly, of all queer things for a Canadian private, a trooper of the Inniskillings: owner, of all queer things, of a milk-walk or a dairy farm, outside Sydney, which is in Australia . . . A man of sentimental complications, jauntiness as became an Inniskilling, a Cockney accent such as ornaments the inhabitants of Sydney, and a complete distrust of lawyers. On the other hand, with the completest trust in Tietjens. Over his shoulder—he was blond, upright, with his numerals shining like gold, looked a lumpish, *café-au-lait*, eagle-nosed countenance: a half-caste member of one of the Six Nations, who had been a doctor's errand boy in Quebec . . . He had his troubles, but was difficult to understand. Behind him, very black-avised with a high colour, truculent eyes and an Irish accent, was a graduate of McGill University who had been a teacher of languages in Tokyo and had some sort of claim against the Japanese Government . . . And faces, two and two, in a coil round the hut . . . Like dust: like a cloud of dust that would approach and overwhelm a landscape: every one with preposterous troubles and anxieties, even if they did not overwhelm you personally with them. . . Brown dust . . .

He kept the Inniskilling waiting while he scribbled the rapid sestet to his sonnet which ought to make a little plainer what it all meant. Of course the general idea was that, when you got into the line or near it, there was no room for swank: typified by expensive funerals. As you might say: No flowers by compulsion . . . No more parades! . . . He had also to explain, while he did it, to the heroic veterinary sexagenarian that he need not feel shy about going into the Glamorganshire Mess on a man-catching expedition. The Glamorganshires were bound

to lend him, Tietjens, P.B. officers if they had not got other jobs. Lieutenant Hotchkiss could speak to Colonel Johnson, whom he would find in the mess and quite good natured over his dinner. A pleasant and sympathetic old gentleman who would appreciate Hotchkiss's desire not to go superfluously into the line. Hotchkiss could offer to take a look at the colonel's charger: a Hun horse, captured on the Marne and called Schomburg, that was off its feed. . . . He added: 'But don't do anything professional to Schomburg. I ride him myself!'

He threw his sonnet across to Mackenzie, who with a background of huddled khaki limbs and anxious faces was himself anxiously counting out French currency notes and dubious-looking tokens. . . . What the deuce did men want to draw money—sometimes quite large sums of money, the Canadians being paid in dollars converted into local coins—when in an hour or so they would be going up? But they always did and their accounts were always in an incredibly entangled state. Mackenzie might well look worried. As like as not he might find himself a fiver or more down at the end of the evening for unauthorized payments. If he had only his pay and an extravagant wife to keep, that might well put the wind up him. But that was *his* funeral. He told Lieutenant Hotchkiss to come and have a chat with him in his hut, the one next the mess. About horses. He knew a little about horse-illness himself. Only empirically, of course.

Mackenzie was looking at his watch.

'You took two minutes and eleven seconds,' he said. 'I'll take it for granted it's a sonnet . . . I have not read it because I can't turn it into Latin here . . . I haven't got your knack of doing eleven things at once. . . .'

A man with a worried face, encumbered by a bundle and a small book, was studying figures at Mackenzie's elbow. He interrupted Mackenzie in a high American voice to say that he had never drawn fourteen dollars seventy-five cents in Thrasna Barracks, Aldershot.

Mackenzie said to Tietjens:

'You understand. I have not read your sonnet. I shall turn it into Latin in the mess: in the time stipulated. I don't want you to think I've read it and taken time to think about it.'

The man besides him said:

'When I went to the Canadian Agent, Strand, London, his office was shut up . . .'

Mackenzie said with white fury:

'How much service have you got? Don't you know better than to interrupt an officer when he is talking? You must settle your own figures with your own confounded Colonial paymaster: I've sixteen dollars thirty cents here for you. Will you take them or leave them?'

Tietjens said:

'I know that man's case. Turn him over to me. It isn't complicated. He's got his paymaster's cheque, but doesn't know how to cash it and of course they won't give him another. . . .'

The man with slow, broad, brown features looked from one to the other officer's face and back again with a keen black-eyed scrutiny as if he were looking into a wind and dazed by the light. He began a long story of how he owed Fat-Eared Bill fifty dollars lost at House. He was perhaps half Chinese, half Finn. He continued to talk, being in a state of great anxiety about his money. Tietjens addressed himself to the cases of the Sydney Inniskilling ex-trooper and the McGill graduate who had suffered at the hands of the Japanese Educational Ministry. It made altogether a complicated effect. 'You would say,' Tietjens said to himself, 'that, all together, it ought to be enough to take my mind up.'

The upright trooper had a very complicated sentimental history. It was difficult to advise him before his fellows. He, however, felt no diffidence. He discussed the points of the girl called Rosie whom he had followed from Sydney to British Columbia, of the girl called Gwen with whom he had taken up in Aberystwyth, of the woman called Mrs Hosier with whom he had lived maritally, on a

sleeping-out pass, at Berwick St. James, near Salisbury Plain. Through the continuing voice of the half-caste Chinaman he discussed them with a large tolerance, explaining that he wanted them all to have a bit, as a souvenir, if he happened to stop one out there. Tietjens handed him the draft of a will he had written out for him, asked him to read it attentively and copy it with his own hand into his soldier's small book. Then Tietjens would witness it for him. He said:

'Do you think this will make my old woman in Sydney part? I guess it won't. She's a sticker, sir. A regular July bur, God bless her.' The McGill graduate was beginning already to introduce a further complication into his story of complications with the Japanese Government. It appeared that in addition to his scholastic performances he had invested a little money in a mineral water spring near Kobe, the water, bottled, being exported to San Francisco. Apparently his company had been indulging in irregularities according to Japanese law, but a pure French Canadian, who had experienced some difficulties in obtaining his baptismal certificate from a mission somewhere in the direction of the Klondike, was allowed by Tietjens to interrupt the story of the graduate; and several men without complications, but anxious to get their papers signed so as to write last letters home before the draft moved, overflowed across Tietjens' table. . . .

The tobacco smoke from the pipes of the N.C.O.'s at the other end of the room hung, opalescent, beneath the wire cages of the brilliant hurricane lamps hung over each table; buttons and numerals gleamed in the air that the universal khaki tinge of the limbs seemed to turn brown, as if into a gas of dust. Nasal voices, throat voices, drawling voices, melted into a rustle so that the occasional high, sing-song profanity of a Welsh N.C.O.: Why the *hell* haffn't you got your 124? Why the ——— hell haffn't you got your 124? Don't you *know* you haff to haff your bleedin' 124's? seemed to wail tragically through a silence . . . The evening wore on and on. It astounded Tietjens,

looking at one time at his watch, to discover that it was only 21 hrs. 19. He seemed to have been thinking drowsily of his own affairs for ten hours. . . . For, in the end, these were his own affairs. . . . Money, women, testamentary bothers. Each of these complications from over the Atlantic and round the world were his own troubles: a world in labour: an army being moved off in the night. Shoved off. Anyhow. And over the top. A lateral section of the world. . . .

He had happened to glance at the medical history of a man beside him and noticed that he had been described as C1. . . . It was obviously a slip of the pen on the part of the Medical Board, or one of their orderlies. He had written C instead of A. The man was Pte. 197394 Thomas Johnson, a shining-faced lump of beef, an agricultural odd jobman from British Columbia where he had worked on the immense estates of Sylvia Tietjens' portentous ducal second cousin Rugeley. It was a double annoyance. Tietjens had not wanted to be reminded of his wife's second cousin, because he had not wanted to be reminded of his wife. He had determined to give his thoughts a field day on that subject when he got warm into his flea-bag in his hut that smelt of paraffin whilst the canvas walls crackled with frost and the moon shone. . . . He would think of Sylvia beneath the moon. He was determined not to now! But 197394 Pte. Johnson, Thomas, was otherwise a nuisance and Tietjens cursed himself for having glanced at the man's medical history. If this preposterous yokel was C3 he could not go on a draft . . . C1 rather! It was all the same. That would mean finding another man to make up the strength and that would drive Sergeant-Major Cowley out of his mind. He looked up towards the ingenuous, protruding, shining, liquid, bottle-blue eyes of Thomas Johnson. . . . The fellow had never had an illness. He could not have had an illness—except from a surfeit of cold, fat, boiled pork—and for that you would give him a horse's blue ball and drench which, ten to one, would not remove the cause of the belly-ache. . . .

His eyes met the non-committal glance of a dark,

gentlemanly thin fellow with a strikingly scarlet hatband, a lot of gilt about his khaki and little strips of steel chain-armour on his shoulders. . . . Levin . . . Colonel Levin, G.S.O. II, or something, attached to General Lord Edward Campion. . . . How the hell did fellows get into these intimacies of commanders of units and their men? Swimming in like fishes into the brown air of a tank and there at your elbow . . . — spies! . . . The men had all been called to attention and stood like gasping codfish. The ever-watchful Sergeant-Major Cowley had drifted to his, Tietjens', elbow. You protect your ofrcers from the gawdy Staff as you protect your infant daughters in lambswool from draughts. The dark, bright, cheerful staffwallah said with a slight lisp:

'Busy, I see.' He might have been standing there for a century and have a century of the battalion headquarters' time to waste like that. 'What draft is this?'

Sergeant-Major Cowley, always ready in case his ofrcer should not know the name of his unit or his own name, said:

'No. 16 I.B.D. Canadian First Division Casual Number Four Draft, sir.'

Coloney Levin let air lispingly out between his teeth.

'No. 16 Draft not off yet . . . Dear, dear! Dear, dear! . . . We shall be strafed to hell by First Army. . . .' He used the word hell as if he had first wrapped it in eau-de-cologned cotton-wadding.

Tietjens, on his feet, knew this fellow very well: a fellow who had been a very bad Society water-colour painter of good family on the mother's side: hence the cavalry gadgets on his shoulders. Would it then be good . . . say good taste to explode? He let the sergeant-major do it. Sergeant-Major Cowley was of the type of N.C.O. who carried weight because he knew ten times as much about his job as any Staff officer. The sergeant-major explained that it had been impossible to get off the draft earlier. The colonel said:

'But surely, sergeant-majah . . .'

The sergeant-major, now a deferential shopwalker in a lady's store, pointed out that they had had urgent instructions not to send up the draft without the four hundred Canadian Railway Service men who were to come from Etaples. These men had only arrived that evening at 5.30 . . . at the railway station. Marching them up had taken three-quarters of an hour. The colonel said:

'But surely, sergeant-majah . . .'

Old Cowley might as well have said 'madam' as 'sir' to the red hat-band. . . . The four-hundred had come with only what they stood up in. The unit had had to wangle everything: boots, blankets, tooth-brushes, braces, rifles, iron-rations, identity disks out of the depot store. And it was now only twenty-one twenty. . . . Cowley permitted his commanding officer at this point to say:

'You must understand that we work in circumstances of extreme difficulty, sir. . . .'

The graceful colonel was lost in an absent contemplation of his perfectly elegant knees.

'I know, of course. . . .' he lisped. 'Very difficult . . .' He brightened up to add: 'But you must admit you're unfortunate. . . . You must admit that. . . .' The weight settled, however, again on his mind.

Tietjens said:

'Not, I suppose, sir, any more unfortunate than any other unit working under a dual control for supplies. . . .'

The colonel said:

'What's that? Dual . . . Ah, I see you're there, Mackenzie. . . . Feeling well . . . feeling fit, eh?'

The whole hut stood silent. His anger at the waste of time made Tietjens say:

'If you understand, sir, we are a unit whose principal purpose is drawing things to equip drafts with. . . .' This fellow was delaying them atrociously. He was brushing his knees with a handkerchief! 'I've had,' Tietjens said, 'a man killed on my hands this afternoon because we have to draw tin-hats for my orderly room from Dublin on an A.F.B. Canadian from Aldershot. . . . Killed here. . . .

We've only just mopped up the blood from where you're standing. . . .'

The cavalry colonel exclaimed:

'Oh, good gracious me! . . .' jumped a little and examined his beautiful shining knee-high aircraft boots. 'Killed! . . . Here! . . . But there'll have to be a court of inquiry. . . . You certainly are *most* unfortunate, Captain Tietjens. . . . Always these mysterious. . . . Why wasn't your man in a dug-out? . . . Most unfortunate. . . . We cannot have casualties among the Colonial troops. . . . Troops from the Dominions, I mean. . . .'

Tietjens said grimly:

'The man was from Pontardulias . . . not from any Dominion. . . . One of my orderly room. . . . We are forbidden on pain of court martial to let any but Dominion Expeditionary Force men go into the dug-outs. . . . My Canadians were all there. . . . It's an A.C.I. local of the eleventh of November. . . .'

The Staff Officer said:

'It makes of course, a difference! . . . Only a Glamorgan-shire? You say . . . Oh well. . . . But these mysterious. . . .'

He exclaimed, with the force of an explosion, and the relief:

'Look here . . . can you spare possible ten . . . twenty . . . eh . . . minutes? . . . It's not exactly a service matter . . . so per . . .'

Tietjens exclaimed:

'You see how we're situated, colonel . . . ' and like one sowing grass seed on a lawn, extended both hands over his papers and towards his men. . . . He was choking with rage. Colonel Levin had, under the chaperonage of an English dowager, who ran a chocolate store down on the quays in Rouen, a little French piece to whom he was quite seriously engaged. In the most naïve manner. And the young woman, fantastically jealous, managed to make endless insults to herself out of her almost too handsome colonel's barbaric French. It was an idyll, but it drove the colonel frantic. At such times Levin would consult Tiet-

jens, who passed for a man of brains and a French scholar as to really nicely turned compliments in a difficult language. . . . And as to how you explained that is was necessary for a G.S.O. II, or whatever the colonel was, to be seen quite frequently in the company of very handsome V.A.D.'s and female organizers of all arms . . . It was the sort of silliness as to which no gentleman ought to be consulted. . . . And here was Levin with the familiar feminine-agonized wrinkle on his bronzed-alabaster brow. . . . Like a beastly soldier-man out of a revue. Why didn't the ass burst into gesture and a throaty tenor. . . .

Sergeant-Major Cowley naturally saved the situation. Just as Tietjens was as near saying *Go to hell* as you can be to your remarkably senior officer on parade, the sergeant-major, now a very important solicitor's most confidential clerk, began whispering to the colonel. . . .

'The captain might as well take a spell as not. . . . We're through with all the men except the Canadian Railway batch, and they can't be issued with blankets not for half an hour . . . not for three-quarters. If then! It depends if our runner can find where Quarter's lance-corporal is having his supper, to issue them. . . .' The sergeant-major had inserted that last speech deftly. The Staff officer, with a vague reminiscence of his regimental days, exclaimed:

'Damn it! . . . I wonder you don't break into the depot blanket store and take what you want. . . .'

The sergeant-major, becoming Simon Pure, exclaimed:

'Oh, no, sir, we could never do that, sir. . . .'

'But the confounded men are urgently needed in the line,' Colonel Levin said. 'Damn it, it's touch and go! . . . We're rushing. . . .' He appreciated the fact again that he was on the gawdy Staff, and that the sergeant-major and Tietjens, playing like left backs into each other's hands, had trickily let him in.

'We can only pray, sir,' the sergeant-major said, 'that these 'ere bloomin' 'Uns has got quartermasters and depots and issuing departments, same as ourselves.' He lowered his voice into a husky whisper. 'Besides, sir, there's

a rumour . . . round the telephone in depot orderly room . . . that there's a W.O. order at 'Edquarters . . . countermanding this and other drafts. . . .'

Colonel Levin said: 'Oh, my God!' and consternation rushed upon both him and Tietjens. The frozen ditches, in the night, out there; the agonized waiting for men; the weight upon the mind like a weight upon the brows; the imminent sense of approaching unthinkableness on the right or the left, according as you looked up or down the trench; the solid protecting earth of the parapet then turns into pierced mist. . . . and no reliefs coming from here. . . . The men up there thinking naïvely that they were coming, and they not coming. Why not? Good God, why not? Mackenzie said:

'Poor — old Bird . . . His crowd had been in eleven weeks last Wednesday. . . . About all they could stick. . . .'

'They'll have to stick a damn lot more,' Colonel Levin said. 'I'd like to get at some of the brutes. . . .'

It was at that date the settled conviction of His Majesty's Expeditionary Force that the army in the field was the tool of politicians and civilians. In moments of routine that cloud dissipated itself lightly: when news of ill omen arrived it settled down again heavily like a cloud of black gas. You hung your head impotently. . . .

'So that,' the sergeant-major said cheerfully, 'the captain could very well spare half an hour to get his dinner. Or for anything else. . . .'

Apart from the domestic desire that Tietjens' digestion should not suffer from irregular meals he had the professional conviction that for his captain to be in intimate private converse with a member of the gawdy Staff was good for the unit. . . . 'I suppose, sir,' he added valedictorily to Tietjens, 'I'd better arrange to put this draft, and the nine hundred men that came in this afternoon to replace them, twenty in a tent. . . . It's lucky we didn't strike them. . . .'

Tietjens and the colonel began to push men out of their way, going towards the door. The Inniskilling-Canadian, a

small open brown book extended deprecatingly, stood, modestly obtrusive, just beside the door-post. Catching avidly at Tietjens' 'Eh?' he said:

'You'd got the names of the girls wrong in your copy, sir. It was Gwen Lewis I had a child by in Aberystwyth that I wanted to have the lease of the cottage and the ten bob a week. Mrs Hosier that I lived with in Berwick St. James, she was only to have five guineas for a soovneer. . . . I've took the liberty of changing the names back again.'

Tietjens grabbed the book from him, and bending down at the sergeant-major's table scrawled his signature on the bluish page. He thrust the book back at the man and said:

'There . . . fall out.' The man's face shone. He exclaimed:

'Thank you, sir. Thank you kindly, captain. . . . I wanted to get off and go to confession. I did bad. . . .' The McGill graduate with his arrogant black moustache put himself in the way as Tietjens struggled into his British warm.

'You won't forget, sir, . . .' he began.

Tietjens said:

'Damn you, I've told you I won't forget. I never forget. You instructed the ignorant Jap in Asaki, but the educational authority is in Tokyo. And your flagitious mineral-water company had their headquarters at the Tan Sen spring near Kobe. . . . Is that right? Well, I'll do my best for you.'

They walked in silence through the groups of men that hung around the orderly room door and gleamed in the moonlight. In the broad country street of the main line of the camp Colonel Levin began to mutter between his teeth:

'You take enough trouble with your beastly crowd . . . a whole lot of trouble. . . . Yet . . .'

'Well, what's the matter with us?' Tietjens said. 'We get our drafts ready in thirty-six hours less than any other unit in this command.'

'I know you do,' the other conceded. 'It's only all these mysterious rows. Now ...'

Tietjens said quickly:

'Do you mind my asking: Are we still on parade? Is this a strafe from General Campion as to the way I command my unit?'

The other conceded quite as quickly and much more worriedly:

'God forbid.' He added more quickly still: 'Old bean!', and prepared to tuck his wrist under Tietjens' elbow. Tietjens, however, continued to face the fellow. He was really in a temper.

'Then tell me,' he said, 'how the deuce you can manage to do without an overcoat in this weather?' If only he could get the chap off the topics of his mysterious rows they might drift to the matter that had brought him up there on that bitter night when he should be sitting over a good wood fire philandering with Mlle Nanette de Bailly. He sank his neck deeper into the sheepskin collar of his British warm. The other, slim, was with all his badges, ribands and mail, shining darkly in a cold that set all Tietjens' teeth chattering like porcelain. Levin became momentarily animated:

'You should do as I do.... Regular hours... lots of exercise... horse exercise.... I do P.T. every morning at the open window of my room... hardening....'

'It must be very gratifying for the ladies in the rooms facing yours,' Tietjens said grimly. 'Is that what's the matter with Mlle Nanette, now? ... I haven't got time for proper exercise....'

'Good gracious, no,' the colonel said. He now tucked his hand firmly under Tietjens' arm and began to work him towards the left hand of the road: in the direction leading out of camp. Tietjens worked their steps as firmly towards the right and they leant one against the other. 'In fact, old bean,' the colonel said, 'Campy is working so hard to get the command of a fighting army—though he's indispensable here—that we might pack up

bag and baggage any day... That is what has made Nanette see reason....'

'Then what am I doing in this show?' Tietjens asked. But Colonel Levin continued blissfully:

'In fact I've got her almost practically for certain to promise that next week... or the week after next at latest... she'll... damn it, she'll name the happy day.'

Tietjens said:

'Good hunting! ... How splendidly Victorian!'

'That's, damn it,' the colonel exclaimed manfully, 'what I say myself... Victorian is what it is... All these marriage settlements... And what is it... *Droits du Seigneur*? ... And notaires... And the Count, having his say... And the Marchioness... And two old grand aunts... But... Hoopla! ...' He executed with his gloved right thumb in the moonlight a rapid pirouette... 'Next week... or at least the week after...' His voice suddenly dropped.

'At least,' he wavered, 'that was what it was at lunch-time... Since then... something happened...'

'You've not been caught in bed with a V.A.D.?' Tietjens asked.

The colonel mumbled:

'No... not in bed... Not with a V.A.D... Oh, damn it, at the railway station... With... The general sent me down to meet her... and Nanny of course was seeing off her grandmother, the Duchesse... The giddy cut she handed me out...'

Tietjens became coldly furious.

'Then it *was* over one of your beastly imbecile rows with Miss de Bailly that you got me out here,' he exclaimed. 'Do you mind going down with me towards the I.B.D. headquarters? Your final orders may have come in there. The sappers won't let me have a telephone, so I have to look in there the last thing... ' He felt a yearning towards rooms in huts, warmed by coke-stoves and electrically lit, with acting lance-corporals bending over A.F.B.'s on a background of deal pigeon-holes filled with returns on buff

and blue paper. You got quiet and engrossment there. It was a queer thing: the only place where he, Christopher Tietjens of Groby, could be absently satisfied was in some orderly room or other. The only place in the world. . . . And why? It was a queer thing. . . .

But not queer, really. It was a matter of inevitable selection if you came to think it out. An acting orderly-room lance-corporal was selected for his penmanship, his power of elementary figuring, his trustworthiness amongst innumerable figures and messages, his dependability. For this he differed a hair's breadth in rank from the rank and file. A hairbreadth that was to him the difference between life and death. For, if he proved not to be dependable, back he went—returned to duty! As long as he was dependable he slept under a table in a warm room, his toilette arrangements and washing in a bully-beef case near his head, a billy full of tea always stewing for him on an always burning stove. . . . A paradise! . . . No! Not a paradise: *the* paradise of the Other Ranks! . . . He might be awakened at one in the morning. Miles away the enemy might be beginning a strafe. . . . He would roll out from among the blankets under the table amongst the legs of hurrying N.C.O.'s and officers, the telephone going like hell. . . . He would have to manifold innumerable short orders on buff slips on a typewriter. . . . A bore to be awakened at one in the morning, but not unexciting: the enemy putting up a tremendous barrage in front of the village of Dranoutre: the whole nineteenth division to be moved into support along the Bailleul-Nieppe road. In case . . .

Tietjens considered the sleeping army. . . . That country village under the white moon, all of sackcloth sides, celluloid windows, forty men to a hut. . . . That slumbering Arcadia was one of . . . how many? Thirty-seven thousand five hundred, say for a million and a half of men. . . . But there were probably more than a million and a half in that base. . . . Well, round the slumbering Arcadias were the fringes of virginly glimmering tents. . . . Fourteen men to

a tent. . . . For a million. . . . Seventy-one thousand four hundred and twenty-one tents round, say, one hundred and fifty I.B.D.'s, C.B.D.'s, R.E.B.D.'s. . . . Base depots for infantry, cavalry, sappers, gunners, airmen, anti-airmen, telephone-men, vets, chiropodists, Royal Army Service Corps men, Pigeon Service men, Sanitary Service men, Women's Auxiliary Army Corps women, V.A.D. women—what in the world did V.A.D. stand for?—canteens, rest-tent attendants, barrack damage superintendents, parsons, priests, rabbis, Mormon bishops, Brahmins, Lamas, Imams, Fanti men, no doubt, for African troops. And all ready dependent on the acting orderly-room lance-corporals for their temporal and spiritual salvation. . . . For, if by a slip of the pen a lance-corporal sent a Papist priest to an Ulster regiment, the Ulster men would lynch him, and all go to hell. Or, if by a slip of the tongue at the telephone, or a slip of the typewriter, he sent a division to Westoutre instead of to Dranoutre at one in the morning, the six or seven thousand poor devils in front of Dranoutre might all be massacred and nothing but His Majesty's Navy could save us. . . .

Yet, in the end, all this tangle was satisfactorily unravelled; the drafts moved off, unknotting themselves like snakes, coiling out of inextricable bunches, sliding vertebrately over the mud to dip into their bowls—the rabbis found Jews dying to whom to administer; the vets, spavined mules; the V.A.D.'s, men without jaws and shoulders in C.C.S.'s; the camp-cookers, frozen beef; the chiropodists, ingrowing toe-nails; the dentists, decayed molars; the naval howitzers, camouflaged emplacements in picturesquely wooded dingles. . . . Somehow they got there—even to the pots of strawberry jam by the ten dozen!

For if the acting lance-corporal, whose life hung by a hair, made a slip of the pen over a dozen pots of jam, back he went, *Returned to duty* . . . back to the frozen rifle, the ground-sheet on the liquid mud, the desperate suction on the ankle as the foot was advanced, the landscapes silhouetted with broken church towers, the continual

drone of the planes, the mazes of duckboards in vast plains of slime, the unending Cockney humour, the great shells labelled *Love to Little Willie*. . . Back to the Angel with the Flaming Sword. The wrong side of him! . . . So, on the whole, things moved satisfactorily. . . .

He was walking Colonel Levin imperiously between the huts towards the mess quarters, their feet crunching on the freezing gravel, the colonel hanging back a little; but a mere light-weight and without nails in his elegant bootsoles, so he had no grip on the ground. He was remarkably silent. Whatever he wanted to get out he was reluctant to come to. He brought out, however:

'I wonder you don't apply to be returned to duty . . . to your battalion. I jolly well should if I were you. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'Why? Because I've had a man killed on me? . . . There must have been a dozen killed to-night.'

'Oh, more, very likely,' the other answered. 'It was one of our own planes that was brought down. . . . But it isn't that. . . . Oh, damn it! . . . Would you mind walking the other way? . . . I've the greatest respect . . . oh, almost . . . for you personally. . . . You're a man of intellect. . . .'

Tietjens was reflecting on a nice point of military etiquette.

This lisping, ineffectual fellow—he was a very careful Staff officer or Champion would not have had him about the place!—was given to moulding himself exactly on his general. Physically, in costume as far as possible, in voice—for his lisp was not his own so much as an adaptation of the general's slight stutter—and above all in his uncompleted sentences and point of view. . . . Now, if he said:

'Look here, colonel . . . ' or 'Look here, Colonel Levin . . . ' or 'Look here, Stanley, my boy . . . ' For the one thing an officer may not say to a superior whatever their intimacy was: 'Look here, Levin . . . ' If he said then:

'Look here, Stanley, you're a silly ass. It's all very well for Champion to say that I am unsound because I've some brains. He's my godfather and has been saying it to me

since I was twelve, and had more brain in my left heel than he had in the whole of his beautifully barbered skull. . . . But when you say it you are just a parrot. You did not think that out for yourself. You do not even think it. You know I'm heavy, short in the wind, and self-assertive . . . but you know perfectly well that I'm as good on detail as yourself. And a damned sight more. You've never caught me tripping over a return. Your sergeant in charge of returns may have. But not you. . . .'

If Tietjens should say that to this popinjay, would that be going farther than an officer in charge of detachment should go with a member of the Staff set above him, though not on parade and in a conversation of intimacy? Off parade and in intimate conversation all His Majesty's poor — officers are equals . . . gentlemen having his Majesty's commission: there can be no higher rank and all that Bilge! . . . For how off parade could this descendant of an old-clo' man from Frankfurt be the equal of him, Tietjens of Groby? He wasn't his equal in any way—let alone socially. If Tietjens hit him he would drop dead; if he addressed a little sneering remark to Levin, the fellow would melt so that you would see the old spluttering Jew swimming up through his carefully arranged Gentile features. He couldn't shoot as well as Tietjens, or ride, or play a hand at auction. Why, damn it, he, Tietjens, hadn't the least doubt that he could paint better water-colour-pictures. . . . And, as for returns . . . he would undertake to tear the guts out of half a dozen new and contradictory A.C.I.'s—Army Council Instructions—and write twelve correct Command Orders founded on them, before Levin had lisped out the date and serial number of the first one. . . . He had done it several times up in the room, arranged like a French blue-stockings' salon, where Levin worked at Garrison headquarters. . . . He had written Levin's blessed command order while Levin fussed and fumed about their being delayed for tea with Mlle de Bailly . . . and curled his delicate moustache . . . Mlle de Bailly, chaperoned by old Lady Sachse, had tea by a clear wood fire in an

eighteenth-century octagonal room, with blue-grey tapestried walls and powdering closets, out of priceless porcelain cups without handles. Pale tea that tasted faintly of cinnamon!

Mlle de Bailly was a long, dark high-coloured Provençale. Not heavy, but precisely long, slow, and cruel; coiled in a deep arm-chair, saying the most wounding, slow things to Levin, she resembled a white Persian cat luxuriating, sticking out a tentative pawful of expanding claws. With eyes slanting pronouncedly upwards and a very thin hooked nose...almost Japanese...And with a terrific cortège of relatives, swell in a French way. One brother a chauffeur to a Marshal of France...An aristocratic way of shirking!

With all that, obviously even off parade, you might well be the social equal of a Staff colonel: but you jolly well had to keep from showing that you were his superior. Especially intellectually. If you let yourself show a Staff officer that he *was* a silly ass—you could say it as often as you liked as long as you didn't prove it!—you could be certain that you would be for it before long. And quite properly. It was not English to be intellectually adroit. Nay, it was positively un-English. And the duty of field officers is to keep messes as English as possible.... So a Staff officer would take it out of such a regimental inferior. In a perfectly creditable way. You would never imagine the hash headquarters warrant officers would make of your returns. Until you were worried and badgered and in the end either you were ejected into, or prayed to be transferred to...any other command in the whole service....

And that was beastly. The process, not the effect. On the whole Tietjens did not care where he was or what he did as long as he kept out of England, the thought of that country, at night, slumbering across the Channel, being sentimentally unbearable to him.... Still, he was fond of old Campion, and would rather be in his command than any other. He had attached to his staff a very decent set of

fellows, as decent as you could be in contact with . . . if you had to be in contact with your kind. . . . So he just said:

'Look here, Stanley, you are a silly ass,' and left it at that, without demonstrating the truth of the assertion.

The colonel said:

'Why, what have I been doing now? . . . I *wish* you would walk the other way. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'No, I can't afford to go out of camp. . . . I've got to come to witness your fantastic wedding-contract to-morrow afternoon, haven't I? . . . I can't leave camp twice in one week. . . .'

'You've got to come down to the camp-guard,' Levin said. 'I hate to keep a woman waiting in the cold . . . though she is in the general's car. . . .'

Tietjens exclaimed:

'You've not been . . . oh, extraordinarily enough, to bring Miss de Bailly out here? To talk to me?'

Colonel Levin mumbled, so low Tietjens almost imagined that he was not meant to hear:

'It isn't Miss de Bailly!' Then he exclaimed quite aloud: 'Damn it all, Tietjens, haven't you had hints enough? . . .'

For a lunatic moment it went through Tietjens' mind that it must be Miss Wannop in the general's car, at the gate, down the hill beside the camp guard-room. But he knew folly when it presented itself to his mind. He had nevertheless turned and they were going very slowly back along the broad way between the huts. Levin was certainly in no hurry. The broad way would come to an end of the hutments; about two acres of slope would descend blackly before them, white stones to mark a sort of coastguard track glimmering out of sight beneath a moon gone dark with the frost. And, down there in the dark forest, at the end of that track, in a terrific Rolls-Royce, was waiting something of which Levin was certainly deucedly afraid. . . .

For a minute Tietjens' backbone stiffened. He didn't intend to interfere between Mlle de Bailly and any married woman Levin had had as a mistress. . . . Somehow he was

convinced that what was in that car was a married woman. . . . He did not dare to think otherwise. If it was not a married woman it might be Miss Wannop. If it was, it couldn't be. . . . An immense waft of calm, sentimental happiness had descended upon him. Merely because he had imagined her! He imagined her little, fair, rather pug-nosed face: under a fur cap, he did not know why. Leaning forward she would be, on the seat of the general's illuminated car: glazed in: a regular raree show! Peering out, shortsightedly on account of the reflections on the inside of the glass. . . .

He was saying to Levin:

'Look here, Stanley . . . why I said you are a silly ass is because Miss de Bailly has one chief luxury. It's exhibiting jealousy. Not feeling it; exhibiting it.'

'*Ought* you,' Levin asked ironically, 'to discuss my fiancée before me? As an English gentleman. Tietjens of Groby and all.'

'Why, of course,' Tietjens said. He continued feeling happy. 'As a sort of swollen best man, it's my duty to instruct you. Mothers tell their daughters things before marriage. Best men do it for the innocent Benedict. . . . woman. . . .'

'I'm not doing it now,' Levin grumbled direly.

'Then what, in God's name, are you doing? You've got a cast mistress, haven't you, down there in old Campion's car? . . . ' They were beside the alley that led down to his orderly room. Knots of men, dim and desultory, still half filled it, a little way down.

'*I haven't*,' Levin exclaimed almost tearfully. 'I never *had* a mistress. . . .'

'And you're not married?' Tietjens asked. He used on purpose the schoolboy's ejaculation 'Lummy!' to soften the jibe. 'If you'll excuse me,' he said, 'I must just go and take a look at my crowd. To see if your orders have come down.'

He found no orders in a hut as full as ever of the dull mists and odours of khaki, but he found in revenge a fine upstanding, blond, Canadian-born lance-corporal of old

Colonial lineage, with a moving story as related by Sergeant-Major Cowley:

'This man, sir, of the Canadian Railway lot, 'is mother's just turned up in the town, come on from Eetarpels. Come all the way from Toronto where she was bedridden.'

Tietjens said:

'Well, what about it? Get a move on.'

The man wanted leave to go to his mother who was waiting in a decent estaminet at the end of the tramline just outside the camp where the houses of the town began.

Tietjens said: 'It's impossible. It's absolutely impossible. You know that.'

The man stood erect and expressionless; his blue eyes looked confoundedly honest to Tietjens who was cursing himself. He said to the man:

'You can see for yourself that it's impossible, can't you?'

The man said slowly:

'Not knowing the regulations in these circumstances I can't say, sir. But my mother's is a very special case. . . . She's lost two sons already.'

Tietjens said:

'A great many people have. . . . Do you understand, if you went absent off my pass I might—I quite possibly might—lose my commission? I'm responsible for you fellows getting up the line.'

The man looked down at his feet. Tietjens said to himself that it was Valentine Wannop doing this to him. He ought to turn the man down at once. He was pervaded by a sense of her being. It was imbecile. Yet it was so. He said to the man:

'You said good-bye to your mother, didn't you, in Toronto, before you left?'

The man said:

'No, sir.' He had not seen his mother in seven years. He had been up in the Chilkoot when war broke out and had not heard of it for ten months. Then he had at once joined up in British Columbia, and had been sent straight through for railway work, on to Aldershot where the Canadians

had a camp in building. He had not known that his brothers were killed till he got there and his mother, being bed-ridden at the news, had not been able to get to Toronto when his batch had passed through. She lived about sixty miles from Toronto. Now she had risen from her bed like a miracle and come all the way. A widow: sixty-two years of age. Very feeble.

It occurred to Tietjens as it occurred to him ten times a day that it was idiotic of him to figure Valentine Wannop to himself. He had not the slightest idea where she was: in what circumstances, or even in what house. He did not suppose she and her mother had stayed on in that dog-kennel of a place in Bedford Park. They would be fairly comfortable. His father had left them money. 'It is preposterous,' he said to himself, 'to persist in figuring a person to yourself when you have no idea of where they are.' He said to the man:

'Wouldn't it do if you saw your mother at the camp gate, by the guard-room?'

'Not much of a leave-taking, sir,' the man said; 'she not allowed in the camp and I not allowed out. Talking under a sentry's nose very likely.'

Tietjens said to himself:

'What a monstrous absurdity this is of seeing and talking, for a minute or so! You meet and talk . . .' And next day at the same hour. Nothing. . . . As well not to meet or talk. . . . Yet the mere fantastic idea of seeing Valentine Wannop for a minute. . . . She not allowed in the camp and he not going out. Talking under a sentry's nose, very likely. . . . It had made him smell primroses. Primroses, like Miss Wannop. He said to the sergeant-major:

'What sort of a fellow is this?' Cowley, in open-mouthed suspense, gasped like a fish. Tietjens said:

'I suppose your mother is fairly feeble to stand in the cold?'

'A very decent man, sir,' the sergeant-major got out, 'one of the best. No trouble. A perfectly clean conduct sheet.'

Very good education. A railway engineer in civil life. . . . Volunteered, of course, sir.'

'That's the odd thing,' Tietjens said to the man, 'that the percentages of absentees is as great amongst the volunteers as the Derby men or the compulsorily enlisted. . . . Do you understand what will happen to you if you miss the draft?'

The man said soberly:

'Yes, sir. Perfectly well.'

'You understand that you will be shot? As certainly as that you stand there. And that you haven't a chance of escape.'

He wondered what Valentine Wannop, hot pacifist, would think of him if she heard him. Yet it was his duty to talk like that: his human, not merely his military duty. As much his duty as that of a doctor to warn a man that if he drank of typhoid-contaminated water he would get typhoid. But people are unreasonable. Valentine too was unreasonable. She would consider it brutal to speak to a man of the possibility of his being shot by a firing party. A groan burst from him. At the thought that there was no sense in bothering about what Valentine Wannop would or would not think of him. No sense. No sense. No sense. . . .

The man, fortunately, was assuring him that he knew, very soberly, all about the penalty for going absent off a draft. The sergeant-major, catching a sound from Tietjens, said with admirable fussiness to the man:

'There, there! Don't you hear the officer's speaking? Never interrupt an officer.'

'You'll be shot,' Tietjens said, 'at dawn. . . . Literally at dawn.' Why did they shoot them at dawn? To rub it in that they were never going to see another sunrise. But they drugged the fellows so that they wouldn't know the sun if they saw it: all roped in a chair. . . . It was really the worse for the firing party. He added to the man:

'Don't think I'm insulting you. You appear to be a very decent fellow. But very decent fellows have gone absent.' He said to the sergeant-major:

'Give this man a two-hours' pass to go to the . . . whatever's the name of the estaminet. . . . The draft won't move off for two hours, will it?' He added to the man: 'If you see your draft passing the pub you run out and fall in. Like mad, you understand. You'd never get another chance.'

There was a mumble like applause and envy of a mate's good luck from a packed audience that had hung on the lips of simple melodrama . . . an audience that seemed to be all enlarged eyes, the khaki was so colourless. . . . They came as near applause as they dared, but there was no sense in worrying about whether Valentine Wannop would have applauded or not. . . . And there was no knowing whether the fellow would not go absent, either. As likely as not there was no mother. A girl very likely. And very likely the man would desert. . . . The man looked you straight in the eyes. But a strong passion, like that for escape—or a girl—will give you control over the muscles of the eyes. A little thing that, before strong passion! One would look God in the face on the day of judgement and lie, in that case.

Because what the devil did he want of Valentine Wannop? Why could he not stall off the thought of her? He could stall off the thought of his wife . . . or his not-wife. But Valentine Wannop came wriggling in. At all hours of the day and night. It was an obsession. A madness. . . . What those fools called 'a complex'! . . . Due, no doubt, to something your nurse had done, or your parents said to you. At birth . . . A strong passion . . . or no doubt not strong enough. Otherwise he, too, would have gone absent. At any rate, from Sylvia . . . Which he hadn't done. Or hadn't he? There was no saying. . . .

It was undoubtedly colder in the alley between the huts. A man was saying: 'Hoo . . . Hooo . . . Hoo . . .' A sound like that, and flapping his arms and hopping . . . 'Hand and foot, mark time! . . .' Somebody ought to fall these poor devils in and give them that to keep their circulations going. But they might not know the command. . . . It was a

Guards' trick, really. . . . What the devil were these fellows kept hanging about here for? he asked.

One or two voices said that they did not know. The majority said gutturally:

'Waiting for our mates, sir. . . .'

'I should have thought you could have waited under cover,' Tietjens said caustically. 'But never mind; it's your funeral, if you like it. . . .' This getting together . . . a strong passion. There was a warmed reception-hut for waiting drafts not fifty yards away. . . . But they stood, teeth chattering and mumbling 'Hoo . . . Hooo . . . ' rather than miss thirty seconds of gabble. . . . About what the English sergeant-major said and about what the officer said and how many dollars did they give you. . . . And of course about what you answered back. . . . Or perhaps not that. These Canadian troops were husky, serious fellows, without the swank of the Cockney or the Lincolnshire Moonrakers. They wanted, apparently, to learn the rules of war. They discussed anxiously information that they received in orderly rooms, and looked at you as if you were expounding the gospels. . . .

But, damn it, he, he himself, would make a pact with Destiny, at that moment, willingly, to pass thirty months in the frozen circle of hell, for the chance of thirty seconds in which to tell Valentine Wannop what he had answered back . . . to Destiny! . . . What was the fellow in the Inferno who was buried to the neck in ice and begged Dante to clear the icicles out of his eyelids so that he could see out of them? And Dante kicked him in the face because he was a Ghibelline. . . . Always a bit of a swine, Dante. . . . Rather like . . . like whom? . . . Oh, Sylvia Tietjens. . . . A good hater! . . . He imagined hatred coming to him in waves from the convent in which Sylvia had immured herself. . . . Gone into retreat. . . . He imagined she had gone into retreat. She had said she was going. For the rest of the war. . . . For the duration of hostilities or life, whichever were the longer. . . . He imagined Sylvia, coiled up on a convent bed. . . . Hating. . . . Her certainly glorious hair all

round her. . . . Hating. . . . Slowly and coldly. . . . Like the head of a snake when you examined it. . . . Eyes motionless: mouth closed tight. . . . Looking away into the distance and hating. . . . She was presumably in Birkenhead. . . . A long way to send your hatred. . . . Across a country and a sea in an icy night. . . . ! Over all that black land and water . . . with the lights out because of air-raids and U-boats. . . . Well, he did not have to think of Sylvia at the moment. She was well out of it. . . .

It was certainly getting no warmer as the night drew on. . . . Even that ass Levin was pacing swiftly up and down in the dusky moon-shadow of the last hutments that looked over the slope and the vanishing trail of white stones. . . . In spite of his boasting about not wearing an overcoat; to catch women's eyes with his pretty Staff gadgets he was carrying on like a leopard at feeding time. . . .

Tietjens said :

'Sorry to keep you waiting, old man . . . Or rather your lady. . . . But there were some men to see to . . . And, you know . . . "The comfort and—what is it?—of the men comes before every—is it 'consideration'?—except the exigencies of actual warfare". . . . My memory's gone phut these days. . . . And you want me to slide down this hill and wheeze back again. . . . To see a woman! . . .'

Levin screeched: 'Damn you, you ass! It's your wife who's waiting for you at the bottom there.'

III

The one thing that stood out sharply in Tietjens' mind when at last, with a stiff glass of rum punch, his officer's pocket-book complete with pencil because he had to draft before eleven a report as to the desirability of giving his unit special lectures on the causes of the war, and a cheap French novel on a camp chair beside him, he sat in his flea-bag with six army blankets over him—the one thing that stood out as sharply as Staff tabs was that that ass Levin

was rather pathetic. His unnailed bootsoles very much cramping his action on the frozen hillside, he had alternately hobbled a step or two, and, reduced to inaction, had grabbed at Tietjens' elbow, while he brought out breathlessly puzzled sentences. . . .

There resulted a singular mosaic of extraordinary, bright-coloured and melodramatic statements, for Levin, who first hobbled down the hill with Tietjens and then hobbled back up, clinging to his arm, brought out monstrosities of news about Sylvia's activities, without any sequence, and indeed without any apparent aim except for the great affection he had for Tietjens himself. . . . All sorts or singular things seemed to have been going on round him in the vague zone, outside all this engrossed and dust-coloured world—in the vague zone that held. . . . Oh, the civilian population, tea-parties short of butter! . . .

And as Tietjens, seated on his hams, his knees up, pulled the soft woolliness of his flea-bag under his chin and damned the paraffin heater for letting out a new and singular stink, it seemed to him that this affair was like coming back after two months and trying to get the hang of battalion orders. . . . You come back to the familiar, slightly battered mess ante-room. You tell the mess orderly to bring you the last two months' orders, for it is as much as your life is worth not to know what is or is not in them. . . . There might be an A.C.I. ordering you to wear your helmet back to the front, or a battalion order that Mills bombs must always be worn in the left breast pocket. Or there might be the detail for putting on a new gas helmet! . . . The orderly hands you a dishevelled mass of faintly typewritten matter, thumbled out of all chance of legibility, with the orders for November 16 fastened inextricably into the middle of those for the 1st of December, and those for the 10th, 15th and 29th missing altogether. . . . And all that you gather is that headquarters has some exceedingly insulting things to say about A Company; that a fellow called Hartopp, whom you don't know, has been deprived of his commission; that at a court of inquiry held to

ascertain deficiencies in C Company Captain Wells—poor Wells!—has been assessed at £27 11s. 4d., which he is requested to pay forthwith to the adjutant. . . .

So, on that black hillside, going and returning, what stuck out for Tietjens was that Levin had been taught by the general to consider that he, Tietjens, was an extraordinarily violent chap who would certainly knock Levin down when he told him that his wife was at the camp gates; that Levin considered himself to be the descendant of an ancient Quaker family. . . . (Tietjens had said *Good God!* at that); that the mysterious 'rows' to which in his fear Levin had been continually referring had been successive letters from Sylvia to the harried general . . . and that Sylvia had accused him, Tietjens, of stealing two pairs of her best sheets. . . . There was a great deal more. But having faced what he considered to be the worst of the situation, Tietjens set himself coolly to recapitulate every aspect of his separation from his wife. He had meant to face every aspect, not that merely social one upon which, hitherto, he had automatically imagined their disunion to rest. For, as he saw it, English people of good position consider that the basis of all marital unions or disunions is the maxim: No scenes. Obviously for the sake of the servants—who are the same thing as the public. No scenes, then, for the sake of the public. And indeed, with him, the instinct for privacy—as to his relationships, his passions, or even as to his most unimportant motives—was as strong as the instinct of life itself. He would, literally, rather be dead than an open book.

And, until that afternoon, he had imagined that his wife, too, would rather be dead than have her affairs canvassed by the other ranks. . . . But that assumption had to be gone over. Revised. . . . Of course he might say she had gone mad. But, if he said she had gone mad he would have to revise a great deal of their relationships, so it would be as broad as it was long . . .

The doctor's batman, from the other end of the hut, said:

'Poor —— O Nine Morgan! . . .' in a sing-song, mocking voice. . . .

For though, hours before, Tietjens had appointed this moment of physical ease that usually followed on his splurging heavily down on to his creaking camp-bed in the doctor's lent hut, for the cool consideration of his relations with his wife, it was not turning out a very easy matter. The hut was unreasonably warm: he had invited MacKenzie—whose real name turned out to be McKechnie, James Grant McKechnie—to occupy the other end of it. The other end of it was divided from him by a partition of canvas and a striped Indian curtain. And McKechnie, who was unable to sleep, had elected to carry on a long—an interminable—conversation with the doctor's batman.

The doctor's batman also could not sleep and, like McKechnie, was more than a little barmy on the crumpet—an almost non-English-speaking Welshman from God knows what up-country valley. He had shaggy hair like a Caribbean savage and two dark, resentful wall-eyes; being a miner he sat on his heels more comfortably than on a chair and his almost incomprehensible voice went on in a low sort of ululation, with an occasionally and startlingly comprehensible phrase sticking out now and then.

It was troublesome, but orthodox enough. The batman had been blown literally out of most of his senses and the VIth Battalion of the Glamorganshire Regiment by some German high explosive or other, more than a year ago. But before then, it appeared, he had been in McKechnie's own company in that battalion. It was perfectly in order that an officer should gossip with a private formerly of his own platoon or company, especially on first meeting him after long separation caused by a casualty to one or the other. And McKechnie had first re-met this scoundrel Jonce, or Evanns, at eleven that night—two and a half hours before. So there, in the light of a single candle stuck in a stout bottle they were tranquilly at it: the batman sitting on his heels by the officer's head; the officer, in his pyjamas, sprawling half out of bed over his pillows,

stretching his arms abroad, occasionally yawning, occasionally asking: 'What became of Company-Sergeant-Major Hoyt?' . . . They might talk till half-past three.

But that was troublesome to a gentleman seeking to recapture what exactly were his relations with his wife.

Before the doctor's batman had interrupted him by speaking startlingly of O Nine Morgan, Tietjens had got as far as what follows with his recapitulation: The lady, Mrs Tietjens, was certainly without mitigation a whore; he himself equally certainly and without qualification had been physically faithful to the lady and their marriage tie. In law, then, he was absolutely in the right of it. But that fact had less weight than a cobweb. For after the last of her high-handed divagations from fidelity he had accorded to the lady the shelter of his roof and of his name. She had lived for years beside him, apparently on terms of hatred and miscomprehension. But certainly in conditions of chastity. Then, during the tenuous and lugubrious small hours, before his coming out there again to France, she had given evidence of a madly vindictive passion for his person. A physical passion at any rate.

Well, those were times of mad, fugitive emotions. But even in the calmest times a man could not expect to have a woman live with him as the mistress of his house and mother of his heir without establishing some sort of claim upon him. They hadn't slept together. But was it not possible that a constant measuring together of your minds was as proper to give you a proprietary right as the measuring together of the limb? It was perfectly possible. Well then . . .

What, in the eyes of God, severed a union? . . . Certainly he had imagined—until that very afternoon—that their union had been cut, as the tendon of Achilles is cut in a hamstringing, by Sylvia's clear voice, outside his house, saying in the dawn to a cabman, 'Paddington!' . . . He tried to go with extreme care through every detail of their last interview in his still nearly dark drawing-room at the other

end of which she had seemed a mere white phosphorescence. . . .

They had, then, parted for good on that day. He was going out to France; she into retreat in a convent near Birkenhead—to which place you go from Paddington. Well then, that was one parting. That, surely, set him free for the girl!

He took a sip from the glass of rum and water on the canvas chair beside him. It was tepid and therefore beastly. He had ordered the batman to bring it him hot, strong and sweet, because he had been certain of an incipient cold. He had refrained from drinking it because he had remembered that he was to think cold-bloodedly of Sylvia, and he made a practice of never touching alcohol when about to engage in protracted reflection. That had always been his theory: it had been immensely and empirically strengthened by his warlike experience. On the Somme, in the summer, when stand-to had been at four in the morning, you would come out of your dug-out and survey, with a complete outfit of pessimistic thoughts, a dim, grey, repulsive landscape over a dull and much too thin parapet. There would be repellent posts, altogether too fragile entanglements of barbed wire, broken wheels, detritus, coils of mist over the positions of revolting Germans. Grey stillness; grey horrors, in front, and behind amongst the civilian populations! And clear, hard outlines to every thought. . . . Then your batman brought you a cup of tea with a little—quite a little—rum in it. In three or four minutes the whole world changed beneath your eyes. The wire aprons became jolly efficient protections that your skill had devised and for which you might thank God; the broken wheels were convenient landmarks for raiding at night in No Man's Land. You had to confess that, when you had re-erected that parapet, after it had last been jammed in, your company had made a pretty good job of it. And, even as far as the Germans were concerned, you were there to kill the swine; but you didn't feel that the thought of them would make you sick beforehand. . . .

You were, in fact, a changed man. With a mind of a different specific gravity. You could not even tell that the roseate touches of dawn on the mists were not really the effects of rum. . . .

Therefore he had determined not to touch his grog. But his throat had gone completely dry; so, mechanically, he had reached out for something to drink, checking himself when he had realized what he was doing. But why should his throat be dry? He hadn't been on the drink. He had not even had any dinner. And why was he in this extraordinary state? . . . For he was in an extraordinary state. It was because the idea had suddenly occurred to him that his parting from his wife had set him free for his girl. . . . The idea had till then never entered his head.

He said to himself: We must go methodically into this! Methodically into the history of his last day on earth. . . .

Because he swore that when he had come out to France this time he had imagined that he was cutting loose from this earth. And during the months that he had been there he had seemed to have no connection with any earthly things. He had imagined Sylvia in her convent and done with; Miss Wannop he had not been able to imagine at all. But she had seemed to be done with.

It was difficult to get his mind back to that night. You cannot force your mind to a deliberate, consecutive recollection unless you are in the mood; then it will do whether you want it to or not. . . . He had had then, three months or so ago, a very painful morning with his wife, the pain coming from a suddenly growing conviction that his wife was forcing herself into an attitude of caring for him. Only an attitude probably, because, in the end, Sylvia was a lady and would not allow herself really to care for the person in the world for whom it would be least decent of her to care. . . . But she would be perfectly capable of forcing herself to take that attitude if she thought that it would enormously inconvenience himself. . . .

But that wasn't the way, wasn't the way, wasn't the way, his excited mind said to himself. He was excited because it

was possible that Miss Wannop, too, might not have meant their parting to be a permanency. That opened up an immense perspective. Nevertheless, the contemplation of that immense perspective was not the way to set about a calm analysis of his relations with his wife. The facts of the story *must* be stated before the moral. He said to himself that he must put, in exact language, as if he were making a report for the use of garrison headquarters, the history of himself in his relationship to his wife. . . . And to Miss Wannop, of course. 'Better put it into writing,' he said.

Well then. He clutched at his pocket-book and wrote in large pencilled characters:

'When I married Miss Satterthwaite,'—he was attempting exactly to imitate a report to General Headquarters—'unknown to myself, she imagined herself to be with child by a fellow called Drake. I think she was not. The matter is debatable. I am passionately attached to the child who is my heir and the heir of a family of considerable position. The lady was subsequently, on several occasions, though I do not know how many, unfaithful to me. She left me with a fellow called Perowne, whom she had met constantly at the house of my godfather, General Lord Edward Campion, on whose staff Perowne was. That was long before the war. This intimacy was, of course, certainly unsuspected by the general. Perowne is again on the staff of General Campion, who has the quality of attachment to his old subordinates, but as Perowne is an inefficient officer, he is used only for more decorative jobs. Otherwise, obviously, as he is an old regular, his seniority should make him a general, and he is only a major. I make this diversion about Perowne because his presence in this garrison causes me natural personal annoyance.

'My wife, after an absence of several months with Perowne, wrote and told me that she wished to be taken back into my household. I allowed this. My principles prevent me from divorcing any woman, in particular any woman who is the mother of a child. As I had taken no

steps to ensure publicity for the escapade of Mrs Tietjens, no one, as far as I know, was aware of her absence. Mrs Tietjens, being a Roman Catholic, is prevented from divorcing me.

‘During this absence of Mrs Tietjens with the man Perowne, I made the acquaintance of a young woman, Miss Wannop, the daughter of my father’s oldest friend, who was also an old friend of General Campion’s. Our station in Society naturally forms rather a close ring. I was immediately aware that I had formed a sympathetic but not violent attachment for Miss Wannop, and fairly confident that my feeling was returned. Neither Miss Wannop nor myself being persons to talk about the state of our feelings, we exchanged no confidences. . . . A disadvantage of being English of a certain station.

‘The position continued thus for several years. Six or seven. After her return from her excursion with Perowne, Mrs Tietjens remained, I believe, perfectly chaste. I saw Miss Wannop sometimes frequently, for a period, in her mother’s house or on social occasions, sometimes not for long intervals. No expression of affection on the part of either of us ever passed. Not one. Ever.

‘On the day before my second going out to France I had a very painful scene with my wife, during which, for the first time, we went into the question of the parentage of my child and other matters. In the afternoon I met Miss Wannop by appointment outside the War Office. The appointment had been made by my wife, not by me. I knew nothing about it. My wife must have been more aware of my feelings for Miss Wannop than I was myself.

‘In St James’s Park I invited Miss Wannop to become my mistress that evening. She consented and made an assignation. It is to be presumed that that was evidence of her affection for me. We have never exchanged words of affection. Presumably a young lady does not consent to go to bed with a married man without feeling affection for him. But I have no proof. It was, of course, only a few

hours before my going out to France. Those are emotional sorts of moments for young women. No doubt they consent more easily.

'But we didn't. We were together at one-thirty in the morning, leaning over her suburban garden gate. And nothing happened. We agreed that we were the sort of persons who didn't. I do not know how we agreed. We never finished a sentence. Yet it was a passionate scene. So I touched the brim of my cap and said: *So long!* . . . Or she. . . I don't remember. I remember the thoughts I thought and the thoughts I gave her credit for thinking. But perhaps she did not think them. There is no knowing. It is no good going into them . . . except that I gave her credit for thinking that we were parting for good. Perhaps she did not mean that. Perhaps I could write letters to her. And live . . .'

He exclaimed:

'God, what a sweat I am in! . . .'

The sweat, indeed, was pouring down his temples. He became instinct with a sort of passion to let his thoughts wander into epithets and go about where they would. But he stuck at it. He was determined to get it expressed. He wrote on again:

'I got home towards two in the morning and went into the dining-room in the dark. I did not need a light. I sat thinking for a long time. Then Sylvia spoke from the other end of the room. There was thus an abominable situation. I have never been spoken to with such hatred. She went, perhaps, mad. She had apparently been banking on the idea that if I had physical contact with Miss Wannop I might satisfy my affection for the girl. . . . And feel physical desires for *her*. . . . But she knew, without my speaking, that I had not had physical contact with the girl. She threatened to ruin me; to ruin me in the Army; to drag my name through the mud. . . . I never spoke. I am damn good at not speaking. She struck me in the face. And went away. Afterwards she threw into the room, through the half-open doorway, a gold medallion of St. Michael, the

R.C. patron of soldiers in action that she had worn between her breasts. I took it to mean the final act of parting. As if by no longer wearing it she abandoned all prayer for my safety. . . . It might just as well mean that she wished me to wear it myself for my personal protection. . . . I heard her go down the stairs with her maid. The dawn was just showing through the chimney-pots opposite. I heard her say: *Paddington*. Clear, high syllables! And a motor drove off.

'I got my things together and went to Waterloo. Mrs Satterthwaite, her mother, was waiting to see me off. She was very distressed that her daughter had not come, too. She was of opinion that it meant we had parted for good. I was astonished to find that Sylvia had told her mother about Miss Wannop because Sylvia had always been extremely reticent, even to her mother. . . . Mrs Satterthwaite, who was *very* distressed—she likes me!—expressed the most gloomy forebodings as to what Sylvia might not be up to. I laughed at her. She began to tell me a long anecdote about what a Father Consett, Sylvia's confessor, had said about Sylvia years before. He had said that if I ever came to care for another woman Sylvia would tear the world to pieces to get at me. . . . Meaning, to disturb my equanimity! . . . It was difficult to follow Mrs Satterthwaite. The side of an officer's train, going off, is not a good place for confidences. So the interview ended rather untidily.'

At this point Tietjens groaned so audibly that McKechnie, from the other end of the hut, asked if he had not said anything. Tietjens saved himself with:

'That candle looks from here to be too near the side of the hut. Perhaps it isn't. These buildings are very inflammable.'

It was no good going on writing. He was no writer, and this writing gave no sort of psychological pointers. He wasn't himself ever much the man for psychology, but one ought to be as efficient at it as at anything else. . . . Well then . . . What was at the bottom of all the madness and

cruelty that had distinguished both himself and Sylvia on his last day and night in his native country? . . . For, mark! It was Sylvia who had made, unknown to him, the appointment through which the girl had met him. Sylvia had wanted to force him and Miss Wannop into each other's arms. Quite definitely. She had said as much. But she had only said that afterwards. When the game had not come off. She had had too much knowledge of amatory manoeuvres to show her hand before. . . .

Why then had she done it? Partly, undoubtedly, out of pity for him. She had given him a rotten time; she had undoubtedly, at one moment, wanted to give him the consolation of his girl's arms. . . . Why, damn it, she, Sylvia, and no one else, had forced out of him the invitation to the girl to become his mistress. Nothing but the infernal cruelty of their interview of the morning could have forced him to the pitch of sexual excitement that would make him make a proposal of illicit intercourse to a young lady to whom hitherto he had spoken not even one word of affection. It was an effect of a Sadic kind. That was the only way to look at it scientifically. And without doubt Sylvia had known what she was doing. The whole morning, at intervals, like a person directing the whiplash to a cruel spot of pain, reiteratedly, she had gone on and on. She had accused him of having Valentine Wannop for his mistress. She had accused him of having Valentine Wannop for his mistress. She had accused him of having Valentine Wannop for his mistress. . . . With maddening reiteration, like that. They had disposed of an estate; they had settled up a number of business matters; they had decided that his heir was to be brought up as a Papist—the mother's religion! They had gone, agonizedly enough, into their own relationships and past history. Into the very paternity of his child. . . . But always, at moments when his mind was like a blind octopus, squirming in an agony of knife-cuts, she would drop in that accusation. She had accused him of having Valentine Wannop for his mistress. . . .

He swore by the living God. . . . He had never realized

that he had a passion for the girl till that morning; that he had a passion deep and boundless like the sea, shaking like a tremor of the whole world, an unquenchable thirst, a thing the thought of which made your bowels turn over. . . . But he had not been the sort of fellow who goes into his emotions. . . . Why, damn it, even at that moment when he thought of the girl, there, in that beastly camp, in that Rembrandt beshadowed hut, when he thought of the girl he named her to himself Miss Wannop. . . .

It wasn't in that way that a man thought of a young woman whom he was aware of passionately loving. He wasn't aware. He hadn't been aware. Until that morning. . . .

Then . . . that let him out. . . . Undoubtedly that let him out. . . . A woman cannot throw her man, her official husband, into the arms of the first girl that comes along and consider herself as having any further claims upon him. Especially if, on the same day, you part with him, he going out to France! *Did* it let him out? Obviously it did.

He caught with such rapidity at his glass of rum and water that a little of it ran over on to his thumb. He swallowed the lot, being instantly warmed. .

What in the world was he doing? Now? With all this introspection? . . . Hang it all, he was not justifying himself. . . . He had acted perfectly correctly as far as Sylvia was concerned. Not perhaps to Miss Wannop. . . . Why, if he, Christopher Tietjens of Groby, had the need to justify himself, what did it stand for to be Christopher Tietjens of Groby? That was the unthinkable thought.

Obviously he was not immune from the seven deadly sins. In the way of a man. One might lie, yet not bear false witness against a neighbour; one might kill, yet not without fitting provocation or for self-interest; one might conceive of theft as receiving cattle from the false Scots which was the Yorkshireman's duty; one might fornicate, obviously, as long as you did not fuss about it unhealthily. That was the right of the Seigneur in a world of Other

Ranks. He hadn't personally committed any of these sins to any great extent. One reserved the right so to do and to take the consequences. . . .

But what in the world had gone wrong with Sylvia? She was giving away her own game, and that he had never known her do. But she could not have made more certain, if she had wanted to, of returning him to his allegiance to Miss Wannop than by forcing herself there into his private life, and doing it with such blatant vulgarity. For what she had done had been to make scenes before the servants! All the while he had been in France she had been working up to it. Now she had done it. Before the Tommies of his own unit. But Sylvia did not make mistakes like that. It was a game. What game? He didn't even attempt to conjecture! She could not expect that he would in the future even extend to her the shelter of his roof. . . . What then was the game? He could not believe that she could be capable of vulgarity except with a purpose. . . .

She was a thoroughbred. He had always credited her with being that. And now she was behaving as if she had every mean vice that a mare could have. Or it looked like it. Was that, then, because she had been in his stable? But how in the world otherwise could he have run their lives? She had been unfaithful to him. She had never been anything but unfaithful to him, before or after marriage. In a high-handed way so that he could not condemn her, though it was disagreeable enough to himself. He took her back into his house after she had been off with the fellow Perowne. What more could she ask? . . . He could find no answer. And it was not his business!

But even if he did not bother about the motives of the poor beast of a woman, she was the mother of his heir. And now she was running about the world declaiming about her wrongs. What sort of a thing was that for a boy to have happen to him? A mother who made scenes before the servants! That was enough to ruin any boy's life. . . .

There was no getting away from it that that was what Sylvia had been doing. She had deluged the general with

letters for the last two months or so, at first merely contenting herself with asking where he, Tietjens, was and in what state of health, conditions of danger, and the like. Very decently, for some time, the old fellow had said nothing about the matter to him. He had probably taken the letters to be the naturally anxious inquiries of a wife with a husband at the front; he had considered that Tietjens' letters to her must have been insufficiently communicative, or concealed what she imagined to be wounds or a position of desperate danger. That would not have been very pleasant in any case; women should not worry superior officers about the vicissitudes of their menfolk. It was not done. Still, Sylvia was very intimate with Campion and his family—more intimate than he himself was, though Campion was his godfather. But quite obviously her letters had got worse and worse.

It was difficult for Tietjens to make out exactly what she had said. His channel of information had been Levin, who was too gentlemanly ever to say anything direct at all. Too gentlemanly, too implicitly trustful of Tietjens' honour . . . and too bewildered by the charms of Sylvia, who had obviously laid herself out to bewilder the poor Staff-wallah. . . . But she had gone pretty far, either in her letters or in her conversation since she had been in that city, to which—it was characteristic—she had come without any sort of passports or papers, just walking past gentlemen in their wooden boxes at pierheads and the like, in conversation with—of all people in the world!—with Perowne, who had been returning from leave with King's dispatches, or something glorified of the Staff sort! In a special train very likely. That was Sylvia all over.

Levin said that Campion had given Perowne the most frightful dressing down he had ever heard mortal man receive. And it really was *damn* hard on the poor general, who, after happenings to one of his predecessors, had been perfectly rabid to keep skirts out of his headquarters. Indeed it was one of the crosses of Levin's worried life that the general had absolutely refused him, Levin, leave

to marry Miss de Bailly if he would not undertake that that young woman should leave France by the first boat after the ceremony. Levin, of course, was to go with her, but the young woman was not to return to France for the duration of hostilities. And a fine row all her noble relatives had raised over that. It had cost Levin another hundred and fifty thousand francs in the marriage settlements. The married wives of officers in any case were not allowed in France, though you could not keep out their unmarried ones. . . .

Campion, anyhow, had dispatched his furious note to Tietjens after receiving, firstly, in the early morning, a letter from Sylvia in which she said that her ducal second-cousin, the lugubrious Rugeley, highly disapproved of the fact that Tietjens was in France at all, and after later receiving, towards four in the afternoon, a telegram, dispatched by Sylvia herself from Havre, to say that she would be arriving by a noon train. The general had been almost as much upset at the thought that his car would not be there to meet Sylvia as by the thought that she was coming at all. But a strike of French railway civilians had delayed Sylvia's arrival. Campion had dispatched, within five minutes, his snorter to Tietjens, who he was convinced knew all about Sylvia's coming, and his car to Rouen Station with Levin in it.

The general, in fact, was in a fine confusion. He was convinced that Tietjens, as Man of Intellect, had treated Sylvia badly, even to the extent of stealing two pair of her best sheets, and he was also convinced that Tietjens was in close collusion with Sylvia. As Man of Intellect, Campion was convinced, Tietjens was dissatisfied with his lowly job of draft-forwarding officer, and wanted a place of an extravagantly cushy kind in the general's own entourage. . . . And Levin had said that it made it all the worse that Campion in his bothered heart thought that Tietjens really ought to have more exalted employment. He had said to Levin:

'Damn it all, the fellow ought to be in command of my

Intelligence instead of you. But he's unsound. That's what he is: unsound. He's too brilliant. . . . And he'd talk both the hind legs off Sweedlepumpkins.' Sweedlepumpkins was the general's favourite charger. The general was afraid of talk. He practically never talked with anyone except about his job—certainly never to Tietjens—without being proved to be in the wrong, and that undermined his belief in himself.

So that altogether he was in a fine fume. And confusion. He was almost ready to believe that Tietjens was at the bottom of every trouble that occurred in his immense command.

But, when all that was gathered, Tietjens was not much farther forward in knowing what his wife's errand in France was.

'She complains,' Levin had bleated painfully at some point on the slippery coastguard path, 'about your taking her sheets. And about a Miss . . . a Miss Wanostrocht, is it? . . . The general is not inclined to attach much importance to the sheets. . . .'

It appeared that a sort of conference on Tietjens' case had taken place in the immense tapestried salon in which Champion lived with the more intimate members of his headquarters, and which was, for the moment, presided over by Sylvia, who had exposed various wrongs to the general and Levin. Major Perowne had excused himself on the ground that he was hardly competent to express an opinion. Really, Levin said, he was sulking, because Champion had accused him of running the risk of getting himself and Mrs Tietjens 'talked about'. Levin thought it was a bit thick of the general. Were none of the members of his staff ever to escort a lady anywhere? As if they were sixth-form schoolboys. . . .

'But you . . . you . . . you . . .' he stuttered and shivered together, 'certainly *do* seem to have been remiss in not writing to Mrs Tietjens. The poor lady—excuse me!—really appears to have been out of her mind with anxiety. . . .' That was why she had been waiting in the general's

car at the bottom of the hill. To get a glimpse of Tietjens' living body. For they had been utterly unable, up at H.Q., to convince her that Tietjens was even alive, much less in that town.

She hadn't in fact waited even so long. Having apparently convinced herself by conversation with the sentries outside the guard-room that Tietjens actually still existed, she had told the chauffeur-orderly to drive her back to the Hôtel de la Poste, leaving the wretched Levin to make his way back into the town by tram, or as best he might. They had seen the lights of the car below them, turning, with its gaily lit interior, and disappearing among the trees along the road farther down. . . . The sentry, rather monosyllabically and gruffly—you can tell all right when a Tommie has something at the back of his mind!—informed them that the sergeant had turned out the guard so that all his men together could assure the lady that the captain was alive and well. The obliging sergeant said that he had adopted that manoeuvre which generally should attend only the visits of general officers and, once a day, for the C.O., because the lady had seemed so distressed at having received no letters from the captain. The guard-room itself, which was unprovided with cells, was decorated by the presence of two drunks who, having taken it into their heads to destroy their clothing, were in a state of complete nudity. The sergeant hoped, therefore, that he had done no wrong. Rightly the Garrison Military Police ought to take drunks picked up outside camp to the A.P.M.'s guard-room, but seeing the state of undress and the violent behaviour of these two, the sergeant had thought right to oblige the Red Caps. The voices of the drunks, singing the martial anthem of the 'Men of Harlech', could be heard corroborating the sergeant's opinion as to their states. He added that he would not have turned out the guard if it had not been for its being the captain's lady.

'A damn smart fellow, that sergeant,' Colonel Levin had

said. 'There couldn't have been any better way of convincing Mrs Tietjens.'

Tietjens had said—and even whilst he was saying it he tremendously wished he hadn't:

'Oh, a *damned* smart fellow,' for the bitter irony of his tone had given Levin the chance to remonstrate with him as to his attitude towards Sylvia. Not at all as to his actions—for Levin conscientiously stuck to his thesis that Tietjens was the soul of honour—but just as to his tone of voice in talking of the sergeant who had been kind to Sylvia, and, just precisely, because Tietjens' not writing to his wife had given rise to the incident. Tietjens had thought of saying that, considering the terms on which they had parted, he would have considered himself as molesting the lady if he had addressed to her any letter at all. But he said nothing and, for a quarter of an hour, the incident resolved itself into soliloquy on the slippery hillside, delivered by Levin on the subject of matrimony. It was a matter which, naturally, at that moment very much occupied his thoughts. He considered that a man should so live with his wife that she should be able to open all his letters. That was his idea of the idyllic. And when Tietjens remarked with irony that he had never in his life either written or received a letter that his wife might not have read, Levin exclaimed with such enthusiasm as almost to lose his balance in the mist:

'I was sure of it, old fellow. But it enormously cheers me up to hear you say so.' He added that he desired as far as possible to model his ideas of life and his behaviour on those of this his friend. For, naturally, about as he was to unite his fortunes with those of Miss de Bailly, that could be considered a turning point of his career.

IV

THEY had gone back up the hill so that Levin might telephone to headquarters for his own car in case the

general's chauffeur should not have the sense to return for him. But that was as far as Tietjens got in uninterrupted reminiscences of that scene. . . . He was sitting in his flea-bag, digging idly with his pencil into the squared page of his note-book which had remained open on his knees, his eyes going over and over again over the words with which his report on his own case had concluded—the words: *So the interview ended rather untidily*. Over the words went the image of the dark hillside with the lights of the town, now that the air-raid was finished, spreading high up into the sky below them. . . .

But at that point the doctor's batman had uttered, as if with a jocular, hoarse irony, the name:

'Poor —— O Nine Morgan! . . . ' and over the whitish sheet of paper on a level with his nose Tietjens perceived thin films of reddish purple to be wavering, then a glutinous surface of gummy scarlet pigment. Moving! It was once more an effect of fatigue, operating on the retina, that was perfectly familiar to Tietjens. But it filled him with indignation against his own weakness. He said to himself: Wasn't the name of the wretched O Nine Morgan to be mentioned in his hearing without his retina presenting him with the glowing image of the fellow's blood? He watched the phenomenon, growing fainter, moving to the right-hand top corner of the paper and turning a faintly luminous green. He watched it with a grim irony.

Was he, he said to himself, to regard himself as responsible for the fellow's death? Was his inner mentality going to present that claim upon him? That would be absurd. The end of the earth! The absurd end of the earth. . . . Yet that insignificant ass Levin had that evening asserted the claim to go into his, Tietjens of Groby's, relations with his wife. That was an end of the earth as absurd! It was the unthinkable thing, as unthinkable as the theory that the officer can be responsible for the death of the man. . . . But the idea had certainly presented itself to him. How could he be responsible for the death? In fact—in literalness—he was. It had depended absolutely upon his discre-

tion whether the man should go home or not. The man's life or death had been in his hands. He had followed the perfectly correct course. He had written to the police of the man's home town, and the police had urged him not to let the man come home. . . . Extraordinary morality on the part of a police force! The man, they begged, should not be sent home because a prize-fighter was occupying his bed and laundry. . . . Extraordinary common sense, very likely. . . . They probably did not want to get drawn into a scrap with Red Evans of the Red Castle. . . .

For a moment he seemed to see . . . he actually saw . . . O Nine Morgan's eyes, looking at him with a sort of wonder, as they had looked when he had refused the fellow his leave. . . . A sort of wonder! Without resentment, but with incredulity. As you might look at God, you being very small and ten feet or so below His throne when He pronounced some inscrutable judgment! . . . The Lord giveth home-leave, and the Lord refuseth. . . . Probably not blessed, but queer, be the name of God-Tietjens!

And at the thought of the man as he was alive and of him now, dead, an immense blackness descended all over Tietjens. He said to himself: *I am very tired*. Yet he was not ashamed. . . . It was the blackness that descends on you when you think of your dead. . . . It comes, at any time, over the brightness of sunlight, in the grey of evening, in the grey of the dawn, at mess, on parade: it comes at the thought of one man or at the thought of half a battalion that you have seen, stretched out, under sheeting, the noses making little pimples: or not stretched out, lying face downwards, half buried. Or at the thought of dead that you have never seen dead at all. . . . Suddenly the light goes out. . . . In this case it was because of one fellow, a dirty enough man, not even very willing, not in the least endearing, certainly contemplating desertion. . . . But your dead. . . . *Yours* . . . Your own. As if joined to your own identity by a black cord. . . .

In the darkness outside, the brushing, swift, rhythmic pacing of an immense number of men went past, as if they

had been phantoms. A great number of men in fours, carried forward, irresistibly, by the overwhelming will of mankind in ruled motion. The sides of the hut were so thin that it was peopled by an innumerable throng. A sodden voice, just at Tietjens' head, chuckled: 'For God's sake, sergeant-major, stop these —— I'm too —— drunk to halt them. . . .'

It made for the moment no impression on Tietjens' conscious mind. Men were going past. Cries went up in the camp. Not orders, the men were still marching. Cries.

Tietjens' lips—his mind was still with the dead—said: 'That obscene Pitkins! . . . I'll have him cashiered for this. . . .' He saw an obscene subaltern, small, with one eyelid that drooped.

He came awake at that. Pitkins was the subaltern he had detailed to march the draft to the station and go on to Bailleul under a boozy field officer of sorts.

McKechnie said from the other bed:

'That's the draft back.'

Tietjens said:

'Good God! . . .'

McKechnie said to the batman:

'For God's sake go and see if it is. Come back at once. . . .'

The intolerable vision of the line, starving beneath the moon, of grey crowds murderously elbowing back a thin crowd in brown, zigzagged across the bronze light in the hut. The intolerable depression that, in those days, we felt—that all those millions were the play-things of ants busy in the miles of corridors beneath the domes and spires that rise up over the central heart of our comity, that intolerable weight upon the brain and the limbs, descended once more on those two men lying upon their elbows. As they listened their jaws fell open. The long, polyphonic babble, rushing in from an extended line of men stood easy, alone rewarded their ears.

Tietjens said:

'That fellow won't come back. . . . He can never do an

errand and come back. . . .’ He thrust one of his legs cumbrously out of the top of his flea-bag. He said:

‘By God, the Germans will be all over here in a week’s time!’

He said to himself:

‘If they so betray us from Whitehall that fellow Levin has no right to pry into my matrimonial affairs. It is proper that one’s individual feelings should be sacrificed to the necessities of a collective entity. But not if that entity is to be betrayed from above. Not if it hasn’t the ten-millionth of a chance. . . .’ He regarded Levin’s late incursion on his privacy as inquiries set afoot by the general. . . . Incredibly painful to him: like a medical examination into nudities, but perfectly proper. Old Campion had to assure himself that the other ranks were not demoralized by the spectacle of officers’ matrimonial infidelities. . . . But such inquiries were not to be submitted to if the whole show were one gigantic demoralization!

McKechnie said, in reference to Tietjens’ protruded foot:

‘There’s no good your going out. . . . Cowley will get the men into their lines. He was prepared.’ He added: ‘If the fellows in Whitehall are determined to do old Puffles in, why don’t they recall him?’

The legend was that an eminent personage in the Government had a great personal dislike for the general in command of one army—the general being nicknamed Puffles. The Government, therefore, were said to be starving his command of men so that disaster should fall upon his command.

‘They can recall generals easy enough,’ McKechnie went on, ‘or anyone else!’

A heavy dislike that this member of the lower middle classes should have opinions on public affairs overcame Tietjens. He exclaimed: ‘Oh, that’s all tripe!’

He was himself outside all contact with affairs by now. But the other rumour in that troubled host had it that, as a political manœuvre, the heads round Whitehall—the

civilian heads—were starving the army of troops in order to hold over the allies of Great Britain the threat of abandoning altogether the Western Front. They were credited with threatening a strategic manoeuvre on an immense scale in the Near East, perhaps really intending it, or perhaps to force the hands of their allies over some political intrigue. These atrocious rumours reverberated backwards and forwards in the ears of all those millions under the black vault of heaven. All their comrades in the line were to be sacrificed as a rearguard to their departing host. That whole land was to be annihilated as a sacrifice to one vanity. Now the draft had been called back. That seemed proof that the Government meant to starve the line! McKechnie groaned:

‘Poor —— old Bird! . . . He’s booked. Eleven months in the front line, he’s been. . . . Eleven *months*! . . . I was nine, this stretch. With him.’

He added:

‘Get back into bed, old bean. . . . I’ll go and look after the men if it’s necessary. . . .’

Tietjens said:

‘You don’t so much as know where their lines are. . . .’ And sat listening. Nothing but the long roll of tongues came to him. He said:

‘Damn it! The men ought not to be kept standing in the cold like that. . . .’ Fury filled him beneath despair. His eyes filled with tears. ‘God,’ he said to himself, ‘the fellow Levin presumes to interfere in my private affair. . . . Damn it,’ he said again, ‘it’s like doing a little impertinence in a world that’s foundering. . . .’

‘I’d go out,’ he said, ‘but I don’t want to have to put that filthy little Pitkins under arrest. He only drinks because he’s shellshocked. He’s not man enough else, the unclean little Nonconformist. . . .’

McKechnie said:

‘Hold on! . . . I’m a Presbyterian myself. . . .’

Tietjens answered:

‘You would be! . . .’ He said: ‘I beg your pardon. . . .’

There will be no more parades. . . . The British Army is dishonoured for ever. . . .’

McKechnie said:

‘That’s all right, old bean. . . .’

Tietjens exclaimed with sudden violence:

‘What the hell are you doing in the officers’ lines? . . . Don’t you know it’s a court-martial offence?’

He was confronted with the broad, mealy face of his regimental quartermaster-sergeant, the sort of fellow who wore an officer’s cap against the regulations, with a Tommie’s silver-plated badge. A man determined to get Sergeant-Major Cowley’s job. The man had come in unheard under the roll of voices outside. He said:

‘Excuse me, sir, I took the liberty of knocking. . . . The sergeant-major is in an epileptic fit. . . . I wanted your directions before putting the draft into the tents with the other men. . . .’ Having said that tentatively he hazarded cautiously: ‘The sergeant-major throws these fits, sir, if he is suddenly woke up. . . . And Second-Lieutenant Pitkins woke him very suddenly. . . .’

Tietjens said:

‘So you took on you the job of a beastly informer against both of them. . . . I shan’t forget it.’ He said to himself:

‘I’ll get this fellow one day. . . .’ and he seemed to hear with pleasure the clicking and tearing of the scissors as, inside three parts of a hollow square, they cut off his stripes and badges.

McKechnie exclaimed:

‘Good God, man, you aren’t going out in nothing but your pyjamas. Put your slacks on under your British warm. . . .’

Tietjens said:

‘Send the Canadian sergeant-major to me at the double. . . .’ to the quarter. ‘My slacks are at the tailor’s, being pressed.’ His slacks were being pressed for the ceremony of the signing of the marriage contract of Levin, the fellow who had interfered in his private affairs. He continued into the mealy broad face and vague eyes of the quarter-

master: 'You know as well as I do that it was the Canadian sergeant-major's job to report to me. . . . I'll let you off this time, but, by God, if I catch you spying round the officers' lines again you are for a D.C.M. . . .'

He wrapped a coarse, Red Cross, grey-wool muffler under the turned-up collar of his British warm.

'That swine,' he said to McKechnie, 'spies on the officers' lines in the hope of getting a commission by catching out — little squits like Pitkins, when they're drunk. . . . I'm seven hundred braces down. Morgan does not know that I know that I'm that much down. But you can bet he knows where they have gone. . . .'

McKechnie said:

'I wish you would not go out like that. . . . I'll make you some cocoa. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'I can't keep the men waiting while I dress. . . . I'm as strong as a horse. . . .'

He was out amongst the bitterness, the mist, and the moongleams on three thousand rifle barrels, and the voices. . . . He was seeing the Germans pour through a thin line, and his heart was leaden. . . . A tall, graceful man swam up against him and said, through his nose, like an American: 'There has been a railway accident, due to the French strikers. The draft is put back till three pip emma the day after to-morrow, sir.'

Tietjens exclaimed:

'It isn't countermanded?' breathlessly.

The Canadian sergeant-major said:

'No, sir. . . . A railway accident. . . . Sabotage by the French, they say. . . . Four Glamorganshire sergeants, all nineteen-fourteen men, killed, sir, going home on leave. But the draft is not cancelled. . . .' Tietjens said:

'Thank God!'

The slim Canadian with his educated voice said:

'You're thanking God, sir, for what's very much to our detriment. Our draft was ordered for Salonika till this morning. The sergeant in charge of draft returns showed

me the name *Salonika* scored off in his draft roster. Sergeant-Major Cowley had got hold of the wrong story. Now it's going up the line. The other would have been a full two months' more life for us.'

The man's rather slow voice seemed to continue for a long time. As it went on Tietjens felt the sunlight dwelling on his nearly coverless limbs, and the tide of youth returning to his veins. It was like champagne. He said:

'You sergeants get a great deal too much information. The sergeant in charge of returns had no business to show you his roster. It's not your fault, of course. But you are an intelligent man. You can see how useful that news might be to certain people: people that it's not to your own interest should know these things....' He said to himself: 'A landmark in history....' And then: 'Where the devil did my mind get hold of that expression at this moment?'

They were walking in mist, down an immense lane, one hedge of which was topped by the serrated heads and irregularly held rifles that showed here and there. He said to the sergeant-major: 'Call 'em to attention. Never mind their dressing, we've got to get 'em into bed. Roll-call will be at nine tomorrow.'

His mind said:

'If this means the single command.... And it's bound to mean the single command, it's the turning point.... Why the hell am I so extraordinarily glad? What's it to me?'

He was shouting in a round voice:

'Now then, men, you've got to go six extra in a tent. See if you can fall out six at a time at each tent. It's not in the drill book, but see if you can do it for yourselves. You're smart men: use your intelligences. The sooner you get to bed the sooner you will be warm. I wish I was. Don't disturb the men who're already in the tents. They've got to be up for fatigues tomorrow at five, poor devils. You can lie soft till three hours after that.... The draft will move to the left in fours.... Form fours... Left...'

Whilst the voices of the sergeants in charge of companies yelped varyingly to a distance in the quick march order he said to himself:

'Extraordinarily glad.... A strong passion.... How damn well these fellows move! ... Cannon fodder.... Cannon fodder.... That's what their steps say....' His whole body shook in the grip of the cold that beneath his loose overcoat gnawed his pyjamaed limbs. He could not leave the men, but cantered beside them with the sergeant-major till he came to the head of the column in the open in time to wheel the first double company into a line of ghosts that were tents, silent and austere in the moon's very shadowy light.... It appeared to him a magic spectacle. He said to the sergeant-major: 'Move the second company to B line, and so on,' and stood at the side of the men as they wheeled, stamping, like a wall in motion. He thrust his stick half-way down between the second and third files. 'Now then, a four and half a four to the right; remaining half-four and next four to the left. Fall out into first tents to right and left....' He continued saying 'First four and half, this four to the right.... Damn you, by the left! How can you tell which beastly four you belong to if you don't march by the left.... Remember you're soldiers, not new-chum lumbermen....'

It was sheer exhilaration to freeze there on the down-side of the extraordinary pure air with the extraordinarily fine men. They came round, marking time with the stamp of guardsmen. He said, with tears in his voice:

'Damn it all, I gave them that extra bit of smartness.... Damn it all, there's something I've done....' Getting cattle into condition for the slaughter-house.... They were as eager as bullocks running down by Camden Town to Smithfield Market.... Seventy per cent. of them would never come back.... But it's better to go to heaven with your skin shining and master of your limbs than as a hulking lout.... The Almighty's orderly room will welcome you better in all probability.... He continued exclaiming monotonously.... 'Remaining half-four and next

four to the left. . . . Hold your beastly tongues when you fall out. I can't hear myself give orders. . . .' It lasted a long time. Then they were all swallowed up.

He staggered, his knees wooden-stiff with the cold, and the cold more intense now the wall of men no longer sheltered him from the wind, out along the brink of the plateau to the other lines. It gave him satisfaction to observe that he had got his men into their lines seventy-five per cent. quicker than the best of the N.C.O.'s who had had charge of the other lines. Nevertheless, he swore bitingly at the sergeants: their men were in knots round the entrance to the alleys of ghost-pyramids. . . . Then there were no more, and he drifted with regret across the plain towards his country street of huts. One of them had a coarse ever-green rose growing over it. He picked a leaf, pressed it to his lips and threw it up into the wind. . . . 'That's for Valentine,' he said meditatively. 'Why did I do that? . . . Or perhaps it's for England. . . .' He said: 'Damn it all, this is patriotism? . . . *This* is patriotism. . . .' It wasn't what you took patriotism as a rule to be. There were supposed to be more parades, about that job! . . . But this was just a broke to the wide, wheezy, half-frozen Yorkshireman, who despised every one in England not a Yorkshireman, or from more to the North, at two in the morning picking a leaf from a rose-tree and slobbering over it, without knowing what he was doing. And then discovering that it was half for a pug-nosed girl whom he presumed, but didn't know, to smell like a primrose; and half for . . . England! . . . At two in the morning with the thermometer ten degrees below zero. . . . Damn, it was cold! . . .

And why these emotions? . . . Because England, not before it was time, had been allowed to decide not to do the dirty on her associates! . . . He said to himself: 'It is probably because a hundred thousand sentimentalists like myself commit similar excesses of the subconscious that we persevere in this glorious but atrocious undertaking. All the same, I didn't know I had it in me!' A strong passion! . . . For his girl and his country! . . . Nevertheless,

his girl was a pro-German. . . . It was a queer mix-up! . . . Not of course a pro-German, but disapproving of the preparation of men, like bullocks, with sleek healthy skins for the abattoirs in Smithfield. . . . Agreeing presumably with the squits who had been hitherto starving the B.E.F. of men. . . . A queer mix-up. . . .

At half-past one the next day, in chastened winter sunlight, he mounted Schomburg, a coffin-headed, bright chestnut, captured from the Germans on the Marne by the second battalion of the Glamorganshires. He had not been on the back of the animal two minutes before he remembered that he had forgotten to look it over. It was the first time in his life that he had ever forgotten to look at an animal's hoofs, fetlocks, knees, nostrils and eyes, and to take a pull at the girth before climbing into the saddle. But he had ordered the horse for a quarter to one and, even though he had bolted his cold lunch like a cannibal in haste, there he was three-quarters of an hour late, and with his head still full of teasing problems. He had meant to clear his head by a long canter over the be-hutted downs, dropping down into the city by a bypath.

But the ride did not clear his head—rather, the sleeplessness of the night began for the first time then to tell on him after a morning of fatigues, during which he had managed to keep the thought of Sylvia at arm's length. He had to wait to see Sylvia before he could see what Sylvia wanted. And morning had brought the common-sense idea that probably she wanted to do nothing more than pull the string of the showerbath—which meant committing herself to the first extravagant action that came into her head—and exulting in the consequences.

He had not managed to get to bed at all the night before. Captain McKechnie, who had had some cocoa—a beverage Tietjens had never before tasted—hot and ready for him on his return from the lines, had kept him till past half-past four, relating with a male fury his really very painful story. It appeared that he had obtained leave to go home and divorce his wife, who, during his absence in France, had been

living with an Egyptologist in Government service. Then, acting under conscientious scruples of the younger school of the day, he had refrained from divorcing her. Campion had in consequence threatened to deprive him of his commission. . . . The poor devil—who had actually consented to contribute to the costs of the household of his wife and the Egyptologist—had gone raving mad and had showered an extraordinary torrent of abuse at the decent old fellow that Campion was. . . . A decent old fellow, really. For the interview, being delicate, had taken place in the general's bedroom and the general had not felt it necessary, there being no orderlies or junior officers present, to take any official notice of McKechnie's outburst. McKechnie was a fellow with an excellent military record; you could in fact hardly have found a regimental officer with a better record. So Campion had decided to deal with the man as suffering from a temporary brain-storm and had sent him to Tietjens' unit for rest and recuperation. It was an irregularity, but the general was of a rank to risk what irregularities he considered to be of use to the service.

It had turned out that McKechnie was actually the nephew of Tietjens' very old intimate, Sir Vincent Macmaster, of the Department of Statistics, being the son of his sister who had married the assistant to the elder Macmaster, a small grocer in the Port of Leith in Scotland. . . . That indeed had been why Campion had been interested in him. Determined as he was to show his godson no unreasonable military favours, the general was perfectly ready to do a kindness that he thought would please Tietjens. All these pieces of information Tietjens had packed away in his mind for future consideration and, it being after four-thirty before McKechnie had calmed himself down, Tietjens had taken the opportunity to inspect the breakfasts of the various fatigues ordered for duty in the town, these being detailed for various hours from a quarter to five to seven. It was a matter of satisfaction to Tietjens to have seen to the breakfasts, and inspected his cook-houses, since he did

not often manage to make the opportunity and he could by no means trust his orderly officers.

At breakfast in the depot mess-hut he was detained by the colonel in command of the depot, the Anglican padre and McKechnie; the colonel, very old, so frail that you would have thought that a shudder or a cough would have shaken his bones one from another, had yet a passionate belief that the Greek Church should exchange communicants with the Anglican: the padre, a stout, militant Churchman, had a gloomy contempt for Orthodox theology. McKechnie from time to time essayed to define the communion according to the Presbyterian rite. They all listened to Tietjens whilst he dilated on the historic aspects of the various schisms of Christianity and accepted his rough definition to the effect that, in transubstantiation, the host actually became the divine presence, whereas in consubstantiation the substance of the host, as if miraculously become porous, was suffused with the presence as a sponge is with water. . . . They all agreed that the breakfast bacon supplied from store was uneatable and agreed to put up half a crown a week apiece to get better for their table.

Tietjens had walked in the sunlight down the lines, past the hut with the evergreen climbing rose, in the sunlight, thinking in an interval good humouredly about his official religion: about the Almighty as, on a colossal scale, a great English Landowner, benevolently awful, a colossal duke who never left his study and was thus invisible, but knowing all about the estate down to the last hind at the home farm and the last oak: Christ, an almost too benevolent Land-Steward, son of the Owner, knowing all about the estate down to the last child at the porter's lodge, apt to be got round by the more detrimental tenants: the Third Person of the Trinity, the spirit of the estate, the Game as it were, as distinct from the players of the game: the atmosphere of the estate, that of the interior of Winchester Cathedral just after a Handel anthem has been finished, a perpetual Sunday, with, probably, a little cricket for the

young men. Like Yorkshire of a Saturday afternoon; if you looked down on the whole broad county you would not see a single village green without its white flannels. That was why Yorkshire always leads the averages. . . . Probably by the time you got to heaven you would be so worn out by work on this planet that you would accept the English Sunday, for ever, with extreme relief!

With his belief that all that was good in English literature ended with the seventeenth century, his imaginations of heaven must be materialist—like Bunyan's. He laughed good-humouredly at his projection of a hereafter. It was probably done with. Along with cricket. There would be no more parades of that sort. Probably they would play some beastly yelping game. . . . Like baseball or Association football. . . . And heaven? . . . Oh, it would be a revival meeting on a Welsh hillside. Or Chautauqua, wherever that was. . . . And God? A Real Estate Agent, with Marxist views. . . . He hoped to be out of it before the cessation of hostilities, in which case he might be just in time for the last train to the old heaven. . . .

In his orderly hut he found an immense number of papers. On the top an envelope marked *Urgent. Private* with a huge rubber stamp. From Levin. Levin, too, must have been up pretty late. It was not about Mrs Tietjens, or even Miss de Bailly. It was a private warning that Tietjens would probably have his draft on his hands another week or ten days, and very likely another couple of thousand men extra as well. He warned Tietjens to draw all the tents he could get hold of as soon as possible. . . . Tietjens called to a subaltern with pimples who was picking his teeth with a pen-nib at the other end of the hut: 'Here, you! . . . Take two companies of the Canadians to the depot store and draw all the tents you can get up to two hundred and fifty. . . . Have 'em put alongside my D lines. . . . Do you know how to look after putting up tents? . . . Well then, get Thompson . . . no, Pitkins, to help you. . . .' The subaltern drifted out sulkily. Levin said that the French railway strikers, for some political reason, had

sabotaged a mile of railway, the accident of the night before had completely blocked up all the lines, and the French civilians would not let their own breakdown gangs make any repairs. German prisoners had been detailed for that fatigue, but probably Tietjens' Canadian railway corps would be wanted. He had better hold them in readiness. The strike was said to be a manœuvre for forcing our hands—to get us to take over more of the line. In that case they had jolly well dished themselves, for how could we take over more of the line without more men, and how could we send up more men without the railway to send them by? We had half a dozen army corps all ready to go. Now they were all jammed. Fortunately the weather at the front was so beastly that the Germans could not move. He finished up 'Four in the morning, old bean, *à tantot!*' the last phrase having been learned from Mlle de Bailly. Tietjens grumbled that if they went on piling up the work on him like this he would never get down to the signing of that marriage contract.

He called the Canadian sergeant-major to him.

'See,' he said, 'that you keep the Railway Service Corps in camp with their arms ready, whatever their arms are. Tools, I suppose. Are their tools all complete? And their muster roll?'

'Girtin has gone absent, sir,' the slim dark fellow said, with an air of destiny. Girtin was the respectable man with the mother to whom Tietjens had given the two hours' leave the night before.

Tietjens answered:

'He would have!' with a sour grin. It enhanced his views of strictly respectable humanity. They blackmailed you with lamentable and pathetic tales and then did the dirty on you. He said to the sergeant-major:

'You will be here for another week or ten days. See that you get your tents up all right and the men comfortable. I will inspect them as soon as I have taken my orderly room. Full marching order. Captain McKechnie will inspect their kits at two.'

The sergeant-major, stiff but graceful, had something at the back of his mind. It came out:

'I have my marching orders for two-thirty this afternoon. The notice for inserting my commission in depot orders is on your table. I leave for the O.T.C. by the three train. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'Your commission! . . . ' It was a confounded nuisance.

The sergeant-major said:

'Sergeant-Major Cowley and I applied for our commissions three months ago. The communications granting them are both on your table together. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'Sergeant-Major Cowley. . . . Good God! Who recommended you?'

The whole organization of his confounded battalion fell to pieces. It appeared that a circular had come round three months before—before Tietjens had been given command of that unit—asking for experienced first-class warrant officers capable of serving as instructors in Officers' Training Corps, with commissions. Sergeant-Major Cowley had been recommended by the colonel of the depot, Sergeant-Major Ledoux by his own colonel. Tietjens felt as if he had been let down—but of course he had not been. It was just the way of the army, all the time. You got a platoon, or a battalion, or, for the matter of that, a dug-out or a tent, by herculean labours into good fettle. It ran all right for a day or two, then it all fell to pieces, the personnel scattered to the four winds by what appeared merely wanton orders, coming from the most unexpected headquarters, or the premises were smashed up by a chance shell that might just as well have fallen somewhere else. . . . The finger of Fate! . . .

But it put a confounded lot more work on him. . . . He said to Sergeant-Major Cowley, whom he found in the next hut where all the paper work of the unit was done:

'I should have thought you would have been enormously better off as regimental sergeant-major than with a commission. I know I would rather have the job.' Cowley

answered—he was very pallid and shaken—that with his unfortunate infirmity, coming on at any moment of shock, he would be better in a job where he could slack off, like an O.T.C. He had always been subject to small fits, over in a minute, or couple of seconds even. . . . But getting too near a H.E. shell—after Noircourt, which had knocked out Tietjens himself—had brought them on, violent. There was also, he finished, the gentility to be considered. Tietjens said:

‘Oh, the gentility! . . . That’s not worth a flea’s jump. . . . There won’t be any more parades after this war. There aren’t any now. Look at who your companions will be in an officer’s quarters; you’d be in a great deal better society in any self-respecting sergeants’ mess.’ Cowley answered that he knew the service had gone to the dogs. All the same his missis liked it. And there was his daughter Winnie to be considered. She had always been a bit wild, and his missis wrote that she had gone wilder than ever, all due to the war. Cowley thought that the bad boys would be a little more careful how they monkeyed with her if she was an officer’s daughter. . . . There was probably something in that!

Coming out into the open, confidentially with Tietjens, Cowley dropped his voice huskily to say:

‘Take Quartermaster-Sergeant Morgan for R.S.M., sir.’

Tietjens said explosively:

‘I’m damned if I will.’ Then he asked: ‘Why?’ The wisdom of an old N.C.O.’s is a thing no prudent officer neglects.

‘He can do the work, sir,’ Cowley said. ‘He’s out for a commission, and he’ll do his best. . . .’ He dropped his husky voice to a still greater depth of mystery:

‘You’re over two hundred—I should say nearer three hundred—pounds down in your battalion stores. I don’t suppose you want to lose a sum of money like that?’

Tietjens said:

‘I’m damned if I do. . . . But I don’t see. . . . Oh, yes, I

do. . . . If I make him sergeant-major he has to hand over the stores all complete. . . . To-day. . . . Can he do it?’

Cowley said that Morgan could have till the day after to-morrow. He would look after things till then.

‘But you’ll want to have a flutter before you go,’ Tietjens said. ‘Don’t stop for me.’

Cowley said that he would stop and see the job through. He had thought of going down into the town and having a flutter. But the girls down there were a common sort, and it was bad for his complaint. . . . He would stop and see what could be done with Morgan. Of course it was possible that Morgan might decide to face things out. He might prefer to stick to the money he’d got by disposing of Tietjens’ stores to other battalions that were down, or to civilian contractors. And stand a court martial! But it wasn’t likely. He was a Nonconformist deacon, or pew-opener, or even a minister possibly, at home in Wales. . . . From near Denbigh! And Cowley had got a very good man, a first-class man, an Oxford professor, now a lance-corporal at the depot, for Morgan’s place. The colonel would lend him to Tietjens and would get him rated acting quartermaster-sergeant unpaid. . . . Cowley had it all arranged. . . . Lance-Corporal Caldicott was a first-class man, only he could not tell his right hand from his left on parade. Literally could not tell them. . . .

So the battalion settled itself down. . . . Whilst Cowley and he were at the colonel’s orderly room arranging for the transfer of the professor—he was really only a fellow of his college—who did not know his right hand from his left, Tietjens was engaged in the remains of the colonel’s furious argument as to the union of the Anglican and Eastern rites. The colonel—he was a full colonel—sat in his lovely private office, a light, gay compartment of a tin-hutment, the walls being papered in scarlet, with, on the purplish, thick, soft baize of his table-cover, a tall glass vase from which sprayed out pale Riviera roses, the gift of young lady admirers amongst the V.A.D.’s in the town because he was a darling, and an open, very gilt and leather-bound

volume of a biblical encyclopaedia beneath his delicate septuagenarian features. He was confirming his opinion that a union between the Church of England and the Greek Orthodox Church was the only thing that could save civilization. The whole war turned on that. The Central Empires represented Roman Catholicism, the Allies Protestantism and Orthodoxy. Let them unite. The papacy was a traitor to the cause of civilization. Why had the Vatican not protested with no uncertain voice about the abominations practised on the Belgian Catholics? . . .

Tietjens pointed out languidly objections to this theory. The first thing our ambassador to the Vatican had found out on arriving in Rome and protesting about massacres of Catholic laymen in Belgium was that the Russians before they had been a day in Austrian Poland had hanged twelve Roman Catholic bishops in front of their palaces.

Cowley was engaged with the adjutant at another table. The colonel ended his theologico-political tirade by saying:

'I shall be very sorry to lose you, Tietjens. I don't know what we shall do without you. I never had a moment's peace with your unit until you came.'

Tietjens said:

'Well, you aren't losing me, sir, as far as I know.'

The colonel said:

'Oh, yes, we are. You are going up the line next week. . . .' He added: 'Now, don't get angry with me. . . . I've protested very strongly to old Campion—General Campion—that I cannot do without you.' And he made, with his delicate, thin, hairy-backed, white hands a motion as of washing.

The ground moved under Tietjens' feet. He felt himself clambering over slopes of mud with his heavy legs and labouring chest. He said:

'Damn it all! . . . I'm not fit. . . . I'm C3. . . . I was ordered to live in an hotel in the town. . . . I only mess here to be near the battalion.'

The colonel said with some eagerness:

'Then you can protest to Garrison. . . . I hope you will. . . . But I suppose you are the sort of fellow that won't.'

Tietjens said:

'No, sir. . . . Of course I cannot protest. . . . Though it's probably a mistake of some clerk. . . . I could not stand a week in the line. . . .' The profound misery of brooding apprehension in the line was less on his mind than, precisely, the appalling labour of the lower limbs when you live in mud to the neck. . . . Besides, whilst he had been in hospital, practically the whole of his equipment had disappeared from his kitbag—including Sylvia's two pairs of sheets!—and he had no money with which to get more. He had not even any trench-boots. Fantastic financial troubles settled on his mind.

The colonel said to the adjutant at the other purple baize-covered table:

'Show Captain Tietjens those marching orders of his. . . . They're from Whitehall, aren't they? . . . You never know where these things come from nowadays. I call them the arrow that flieth by night!'

The adjutant, a diminutive, a positively miniature gentleman with Coldstream badges up and a dreadfully worried brow, drifted a quarto sheet of paper out of a pile, across his tablecloth towards Tietjens. His tiny hands seemed about to fall off at the wrists; his temples shuddered with neuralgia. He said:

'For God's sake do protest to Garrison if you feel you can. . . . We *can't* have more work shoved on us. . . . Major Lawrence and Major Halkett left the whole of the work of your unit to us. . . .'

The sumptuous paper, with the royal arms embossed at the top, informed Tietjens that he would report to his VIth battalion on the Wednesday of next week in preparation for taking up the duties of divisional transport officer to the XIX division. The order came from Room G 14 R, at the War Office. He asked what the deuce G 14 R was, of the adjutant, who in an access of neuralgic agony, shook his

head miserably, between his two hands, his elbows on the tablecloth.

Sergeant-Major Cowley, with his air of a solicitor's clerk, said the room G 14 R was the department that dealt with civilian requests for the services of officers. To the adjutant who asked what the devil a civilian request for the employment of officers could have to do with sending Captain Tietjens to the XIX division, Sergeant-Major Cowley presumed that it was because of the activities of the Earl of Beichan. The Earl of Beichan, a Levantine financier and race-horse owner, was interesting himself in army horses, after a short visit to the lines of communication. He also owned several newspapers. So they had been waking up the army transport-animals' department to please him. The adjutant would no doubt have observed a Veterinary-Lieutenant Hotchkiss or Hitchcock. He had come to them through G 14 R. At the request of Lord Beichan, who was personally interested in Lieutenant Hotchkiss's theories, he was to make experiments on the horses of the Fourth Army—in which the XIXth division was then to be found. . . . 'So,' Cowley said, 'you'll be under him as far as your horse lines go. If you go up.' Perhaps Lord Beichan was a friend of Captain Tietjens and had asked for him, too: Captain Tietjens was known to be wonderful with horses.

Tietjens, his breath rushing through his nostrils, swore he would not go up the line at the bidding of a hog like Beichan, whose real name was Stavropolides, formerly Nathan.

He said the army was reeling to its base because of the continual interference of civilians. He said it was absolutely impossible to get through his programme of parades because of the perpetual extra drills that were forced on them at the biddings of civilians. Any fool who owned a newspaper, nay, any fool who could write to a newspaper, or any beastly little squirt of a novelist could frighten the Government and the War Office into taking up one more hour of the men's parade time for patent manœuvres with jampots or fancy underclothing. Now he was asked if his

men wanted lecturing on the causes of the war and whether he—he, good God!—would not like to give the men cosy chats on the nature of the Enemy nations. . . .

The colonel said:

‘There, there, Tietjens! . . . There, there! . . . We all suffer alike. *We’ve* got to lecture our men on the uses of a new patent sawdust stove. If you don’t want that job, you can easily get the general to take you off it. They say you can turn him round your little finger. . . .’

‘He’s my godfather,’ Tietjens thought it wise to say. ‘I never asked him for a job, but I’m damned if it isn’t his duty as a Christian to keep me out of the clutches of this Greek-’Ebrew pagan peer. . . . He’s not even Orthodox, colonel.’

The adjutant here said that Colour-Sergeant Morgan of their orderly room wanted a word with Tietjens. Tietjens said he hoped to goodness that Morgan had some money for him! The adjutant said he understood that Morgan had unearthed quite a little money that ought to have been paid to Tietjens by his agents and hadn’t.

Colour-Sergeant Morgan was the regimental magician with figures. Inordinately tall and thin, his body, whilst his eyes peered into distant columns of cyphers, appeared to be always parallel with the surface of his table and, as he always answered the several officers whom he benefited without raising his head, his face was very little known to his superiors. He was, however, in appearance a very ordinary, thin N.C.O. whose spidery legs, when very rarely he appeared on parade, had the air of running away with him as a race-horse might do. He told Tietjens that, pursuant to his instructions and the A.C.P. i 96 b that Tietjens had signed, he had ascertained that command pay at the rate of two guineas a day and supplementary fuel and light allowance at the rate of 6s. 8d. was being paid weekly by the Paymaster-General’s Department to his, ‘Tietjens’, account at his agents’. He suggested that Tietjens should write to his agents that if they did not immediately pay to his account the sum of £194 13s. 4d., by them received from

the Paymaster's Department, he would proceed against the Crown by Petition of Right. And he strongly recommended Tietjens to draw a cheque on his own bank for the whole of the money because, if by any chance the agents had not paid the money in, he could sue them for damages and get them cast in several thousand pounds. And serve the devils right. They must have a million or so in hand in unpaid command and detention allowances due to officers. He only wished he could advertise in the papers offering to recover unpaid sums due by agents. He added that he had a nice little computation as to variations in the course of Gunter's Second Comet that he would like to ask Tietjens' advice about one of these days. The colour-sergeant was an impassioned amateur astronomer.

So Tietjens' morning went up and down. . . . The money at the moment, Sylvia being in that town, was of tremendous importance to him and came like an answer to prayer. It was not so agreeable, however, even in a world in which, never, never, never for ten minutes did you know whether you stood on your head or your heels, for Tietjens, on going back to the colonel's private office, to find Sergeant-Major Cowley coming out of the next room in which, on account of the adjutant's neuralgia, the telephone was kept. Cowley announced to the three of them that the general had the day before ordered his correspondence-corporal to send a very emphatic note to Colonel Gillum to the effect that he was informing the competent authority that he had no intention whatever of parting with Captain Tietjens, who was invaluable in his command. The correspondence-corporal had informed Cowley that neither he nor the general knew who was the competent authority for telling Room G 14 R at the War Office to go to hell, but the matter would be looked up and put all right before the chit was sent off. . . .

That was good as far as it went. Tietjens was really interested in his present job, and although he would have liked well enough to have the job of looking after the horses of a division, or even an army, he felt he would rather

it was put off till the spring, given the weather they were having and the state of his chest. And the complication of possible troubles with Lieutenant Hotchkiss who, being a professor, had never really seen a horse—or not for ten years!—was something to be thought about very seriously. But all this appeared quite another matter when Cowley announced that the civilian authority who had asked for Tietjens' transfer was the permanent secretary to the Ministry of Transport. . . .

Colonel Gillum said:

'That's your brother, Mark. . . .' And indeed the permanent secretary to the Ministry of Transport was Tietjens' brother Mark, known as the indispensable Official. Tietjens felt a real instant of dismay. He considered that his violent protest against the job would appear rather a smack in the face for poor old wooden-featured Mark who had probably taken a good deal of trouble to get him the job. Even if Mark should never hear of it, a man should not slap his brother in the face! Moreover, when he came to think of his last day in London, he remembered that Valentine Wannop, who had exaggerated ideas as to the safety of First Line Transport, had begged Mark to get him a job as divisional officer. . . . And he imagined Valentine's despair if she heard that he—Tietjens—had moved heaven and earth to get out of it. He saw her lower lip quivering and the tears in her eyes. . . . But he probably had got that from some novel, because he had never seen her lower lip quiver. He had seen tears in her eyes!

He hurried back to his lines to take his orderly room. In the long hut McKechnie was taking that miniature court of drunks and defaulters for him and, just as Tietjens reached it, he was taking the case of Girtin and two other Canadian privates. . . . The case of Girtin interested him, and when McKechnie slid out of his seat Tietjens occupied it. The prisoners were only just being marched in by a Sergeant Davis, an admirable N.C.O. whose rifle appeared to be part of his rigid body and who executed an amazing number of

stamps in seriously turning in front of the C.O.'s table. It gave the impression of an Indian war dance. . . .

Tietjens glanced at the charge sheet, which was marked as coming from the Provost-Marshall's Office. Instead of the charge of absence from draft he read that of conduct prejudicial to good order and military discipline in that. . . . The charge was written in a very illiterate hand; an immense beery lance-corporal of Garrison Military Police, with a red hat-band, attended to give evidence. . . . It was a tenuous and disagreeable affair. Girtin had not gone absent, so Tietjens had to revise his views of the respectable. At any rate of the respectable Colonial private soldier with mother complete. For there really had been a mother, and Girtin had been seeing her into the last tram down into the town. A frail old lady. Apparently, trying to annoy the Canadian, the beery lance-corporal of the Garrison Military Police had hustled the mother. Girtin had remonstrated; very moderately, he said. The lance-corporal had shouted at him. Two other Canadians returning to camp had intervened and two more police. The police had called the Canadians —— conscripts, which was almost more than the Canadians could stand, they being voluntarily enlisted 1914 or 1915 men. The police—it was an old trick—had kept the men talking until two minutes after the last post had sounded and then had run them in for being absent off pass—and for disrespect to their red hat-bands.

Tietjens, with a carefully measured fury, first cross-examined and then damned the police witness to hell. Then he marked the charge sheets with the words, 'Case explained', and told the Canadians to go and get ready for his parade. It meant he was in for a frightful row with the provost-marshal, who was a port-winey old general called O'Hara and loved his police as if they had been ewe-lambs.

He took his parade, the Canadian troops looking like real soldiers in the sunlight, went round his lines with the new Canadian sergeant-major, who had his appointment, thank goodness, from his own authorities; wrote a report

on the extreme undesirability of lecturing his men on the causes of the war, since his men were either graduates of one or other Canadian university and thus knew twice as much about the causes of the war as any lecturer the civilian authorities could provide, or else they were half-breed Micamuc Indians, Esquimaux, Japanese, or Alaskan Russians, none of whom could understand any English lecturer. . . . He was aware that he would have to re-write his report so as to make it more respectful to the newspaper proprietor peer who, at that time, was urging on the home Government the necessity of lecturing all the subjects of His Majesty on the causes of the war. But he wanted to get that grouse off his chest and its disrespect would pain Levin, who would have to deal with these reports if he did not get married first. Then he lunched off army sausage-meat and potatoes, mashed with their skins complete, watered with an admirable 1906 brut champagne which they bought themselves, and an appalling Canadian cheese—at the headquarters table to which the colonel had invited all the subalterns who that day were going up the line for the first time. They had some h's in their compositions, but in revenge they must have boasted of a pint of adenoid growths between them. There was, however, a charming young half-caste Goa second-lieutenant, who afterwards proved of an heroic bravery. He gave Tietjens a lot of amusing information as to the working of the purdah in Portuguese India.

So, at half-past one Tietjens sat on Schomburg, the coffin-headed, bright chestnut from the Prussian horse-raising establishment near Celle. Almost a pure thorough-bred, this animal had usually the paces of a dining-room table, its legs being fully as stiff. But to-day its legs might have been made of cotton-wool, it lumbered over frosty ground breathing stertorously and, at the jumping ground of the Deccan Horse, a mile above and behind Rouen, it did not so much refuse a very moderate jump as come together in a lugubrious crumple. It was, in the light of a red, jocular sun, like being mounted on a broken-hearted

camel. In addition, the fatigues of the morning beginning to tell, Tietjens was troubled by an obsession of O Nine Morgan which he found tiresome to have to stall off.

'What the hell,' he asked of the orderly, a very silent private on a roan beside him, 'what the hell is the matter with this horse? . . . Have you been keeping him warm?' He imagined that the clumsy paces of the animal beneath him added to his gloomy obsessions.

The orderly looked straight in front of him over a valley full of hutments. He said:

'No, sir.' The 'oss 'ad been put in the 'oss-standings of G depot. By the orders of Lieutenant 'Itchcock. 'Osses, Lieutenant 'Itchcock said, 'ad to be 'ardened.

Tietjens said:

'Did you tell him that it was my orders that Schomburg was to be kept warm? In the stables of the farm behind No. XVI I.B.D.'

'The lieutenant,' the orderly explained woodenly, 'said as 'ow henny departure f'm 'is orders would be visited by the extreme displeasure of Lord Breech'em, K.C.V.O., K.C.B., etcetera.' The orderly was quivering with rage.

'You will,' Tietjens said very carefully, 'when you fall out with the horses at the Hôtel de la Poste, take Schomburg and the roan to the stables of La Volonté Farm, behind No. XVI I.B.D.' The orderly was to close all the windows of the stable, stopping up any chinks with wadding. He would procure, if possible, a sawdust stove, new pattern, from Colonel Gillum's store and light it in the stables. He was also to give Schomburg and the roan oatmeal and water warmed as hot as the horses would take it. . . . And Tietjens finished sharply, 'If Lieutenant Hotchkiss makes any comments, you will refer him to me. As his C.O.'

The orderly seeking information as to horse-ailments, Tietjens said:

'The school of horse-copers, to which Lord Beichan belongs, believes in the hardening of all horse-flesh other than racing cattle.' They bred racing-cattle. Under six

blankets apiece! Personally Tietjens did not believe in the hardening process and would not permit any animal over which he had control to be submitted to it. . . . It had been observed that if any animal was kept at a lower temperature than that of its normal climatic condition it would contract diseases to which ordinarily it was not susceptible. . . . If you keep a chicken for two days in a pail of water it will contract human scarlet-fever or mumps if injected with either bacillus. If you remove the chicken from the water, dry it, and restore it to its normal conditions, the scarlet-fever or the mumps will die out of the animal. . . . He said to the orderly: 'You are an intelligent man. What deduction do you draw?'

The orderly looked away over the valley of the Seine.

'I suppose, sir,' he said, 'that our 'osses, being kept alwise cold in their standings, 'as hillnesses they wouldn't other-wise 'ave.'

'Well, then,' Tietjens said, 'keep the poor animals warm.'

He considered that here was the makings of a very nasty row for himself if, by any means, his sayings came round to the ears of Lord Beichan. But that he had to chance. He could not let a horse for which he was responsible be martyred. . . . There was too much to think about . . . so that nothing at all stood out to be thought of. The sun was glowing. The valley of the Seine was blue-grey, like a Gobelin tapestry. Over it all hung the shadow of a deceased Welsh soldier. An odd skylark was declaiming over an empty field behind the incinerators' headquarters. . . . An odd lark. For as a rule larks do not sing in December. Larks sing only when courting, or over the nest. . . . The bird must be oversexed. O Nine Morgan was the other thing, that accounting for the prize-fighter!

They dropped down a mud lane between brick walls into the town. . . .

PART TWO

I

IN the admirably appointed, white-enamelled, wicker-worked, bemirrored lounge of the best hotel of that town Sylvia Tietjens sat in a wickerwork chair, not listening rather abstractedly to a staff-major who was lachrymosely and continuously begging her to leave her bedroom door unlocked that night. She said:

'I don't know. . . . Yes, perhaps. . . . I don't know. . . .'
And looked distantly into a bluish wall-mirror that, like all the rest, was framed with white-painted cork bark. She stiffened a little and said:

'There's Christopher!'

The staff-major dropped his hat, his stick and his gloves. His black hair, which was without parting and heavy with some preparation of a glutinous kind, moved agitatedly on his scalp. He had been saying that Sylvia had ruined his life. Didn't Sylvia know that she had ruined his life? But for her he might have married some pure young thing. Now he exclaimed:

'But what does he want? . . . Good God! . . . what does he want?'

'He wants,' Sylvia said, 'to play the part of Jesus Christ.'

Major Perowne exclaimed:

'Jesus Christ! . . . But he's the most foul-mouthed officer in the general's command. . . .'

'Well,' Sylvia said, 'if you had married your pure young thing she'd have . . . What is it? . . . cuckolded you within nine months. . . .'

Perowne shuddered a little at the word. He mumbled:

'I don't see. . . It seems to be the other way. . .'

'Oh, no, it isn't,' Sylvia said. 'Think it over. . . Morally, *you're* the husband. . . Immorally, I should say. . . Because he's the man I want. . . He looks ill. . . Do hospital authorities always tell wives what is the matter with their husbands?'

From his angle in the chair from which he had half-emerged Sylvia seemed to him to be looking at a blank wall.

'I don't see him,' Perowne said.

'I can see him in the glass,' Sylvia said. 'Look! From here you can see him.'

Perowne shuddered a little more.

'I don't want to see him. . . I have to see him sometimes in the course of duty. . . I don't like to . . .'

Sylvia said:

'*You*,' in a tone of very deep contempt. 'You only carry chocolate boxes to flappers. . . How can he come across you in the course of duty? . . . You're not a *soldier*!'

Perowne said:

'But what are we going to do? What will *he* do?'

'I,' Sylvia answered, 'shall tell the page-boy when he comes with his card to say that I'm engaged. . . I don't know what *he'll* do. Hit you, very likely. . . He's looking at your back now. . .'

Perowne became rigid, sunk into his deep chair.

'But he *couldn't*!' he exclaimed agitatedly. 'You said that he was playing the part of Jesus Christ. Our Lord wouldn't hit people in an hotel lounge. . .'

'Our Lord!' Sylvia said contemptuously. 'What do you know about our Lord? . . . Our Lord was a gentleman. . . Christopher is playing at being our Lord calling on the woman taken in adultery. . . He's giving me the social backing that his being my husband seems to him to call for.'

A one-armed, bearded *maître d'hôtel* approached them through groups of arm-chairs arranged for *tête-à-tête*. He said:

'Pardon . . . I did not see madame at first. . . .' And displayed a card on a salver. Without looking at it, Sylvia said:

'*Dites à ce monsieur . . .* that I am occupied.' The *maître d'hôtel* moved austere away.

'But he'll smash me to pieces . . .' Perowne exclaimed. 'What am I to do? . . . What the deuce am I to do?' There would have been no way of exit for him except across Tietjens' face.

With her spine very rigid and the expression of a snake that fixes a bird, Sylvia gazed straight in front of her and said nothing until she exclaimed:

'For God's sake leave off trembling. . . . He would not do anything to a girl like you. . . . He's a man. . . .' The wicker-work of Perowne's chair had been crepitating as if it had been in a railway car. The sound ceased with a jerk. . . . Suddenly she clenched both her hands and let out a hateful little breath of air between her teeth.

'By the immortal saints,' she exclaimed, 'I swear I'll make his wooden face wince yet.'

In the bluish looking-glass, a few minutes before, she had seen the agate-blue eyes of her husband, thirty feet away, over arm-chairs and between the fans of palms. He was standing, holding a riding-whip, looking rather clumsy in the uniform that did not suit him. Rather clumsy and worn out, but completely expressionless! He had looked straight into the reflection of her eyes and then looked away. He moved so that his profile was towards her, and continued gazing motionless at an elk's head that decorated the space of wall above glazed doors giving into the interior of the hotel. The hotel servant approaching him, he had produced a card and had given it to the servant, uttering three words. She saw his lips move in the three words: Mrs Christopher Tietjens. She said, beneath her breath:

'Damn his chivalry! . . . Oh, God damn his chivalry!' She knew what was going on in his mind. He had seen her, with Perowne, so he had neither come towards her nor directed the servant to where she sat. For fear of embarrass-

ing her! He would leave it to her to come to him if she wished.

The servant, visible in the mirror, had come and gone deviously back, Tietjens still gazing at the elk's head. He had taken the card and restored it to his pocket-book and then had spoken to the servant. The servant had shrugged his shoulders with the formal hospitality of his class and, with his shoulders still shrugged and his one hand pointing towards the inner door, had preceded Tietjens into the hotel. Not one line of Tietjens' face had moved when he had received back his card. It had been then that Sylvia had sworn that she would yet make his wooden face wince. . . .

His face was intolerable. Heavy; fixed. Not insolent, but simply gazing over the heads of all things and created beings, into a world too distant for them to enter. . . . And yet it seemed to her, since he was so clumsy and worn out, almost not sporting to persecute him. It was like whipping a dying bulldog. . . .

She sank back into her chair with a movement almost of discouragement. She said:

'He's gone into the hotel. . . .'

Perowne lurched agitatedly forward in his chair. He exclaimed that he was going. Then he sank discouragedly back again:

'No, I'm not,' he said, 'I'm probably much safer here. I might run against him going out.'

'You've realized that my petticoats protect you,' Sylvia said contemptuously. 'Of course, Christopher would never hit anyone in my presence.'

Major Perowne was interrupting her by asking:

'What's he going to do? What's he doing in the hotel?'

Mrs Tietjens said:

'Guess!' She added: 'What would you do in similar circumstances?'

'Go and wreck your bedroom,' Perowne answered with promptitude. 'It's what I did when I found you had left Yssingueux.'

Sylvia said:

'Ah, that was what the place was called.'

Perowne groaned:

'You're callous,' he said. 'There's no other word for it. Callous. That's what you are.'

Sylvia asked absently why he called her callous at just that juncture. She was imagining Christopher stumping clumsily along the hotel corridor looking at bedrooms, and then giving the hotel servant a handsome tip to ensure that he should be put on the same floor as herself. She could almost hear his not disagreeable male voice that vibrated a little from the chest and made her vibrate.

Perowne was grumbling on. Sylvia was callous because she had forgotten the name of the Brittany hamlet in which they had spent three blissful weeks together, though she had left it so suddenly that all her outfit remained in the hotel.

'Well, it wasn't any kind of a beanfeast for me.' Sylvia went on, when she again gave him her attention. 'Good heavens! . . . Do you think it *would* be any kind of a beanfeast with you, *pour tout potage*? Why should I remember the name of the hateful place?'

Perowne said:

'Yssingueux-les-Pervenches, such a pretty name,' reproachfully.

'It's no good,' Sylvia answered, 'your trying to awaken sentimental memories in me. You will have to make me forget what you were like if you want to carry on with me. . . . I'm stopping here and listening to your corncrake of a voice because I want to wait until Christopher goes out of the hotel . . . Then I am going to my room to tidy up for Lady Sachse's party and you will sit here and wait for me.'

'I'm *not*,' Perowne said, 'going to Lady Sachse's. Why, *he* is going to be one of the principal witnesses to sign the marriage contract. And Old Campion and all the rest of the staff are going to be there. . . . You don't catch *me*. . . . An unexpected prior engagement is my line. No fear.'

'You'll come with me, my little man,' Sylvia said, 'if you

ever want to bask in my smile again. . . . I'm not going to Lady Sachse's alone, looking as if I couldn't catch a man to escort me, under the eyes of half the French house of peers. . . . If they've got a house of peers! . . . You don't catch *me*. . . . No fear!' she mimicked his creaky voice. 'You can go away as soon as you've shown yourself as my escort. . . .'

'But, good God!' Perowne cried out, 'that's just what I mustn't do. Champion said that if he heard any more of my being seen about with you he would have me sent back to my beastly regiment. And my beastly regiment is in the trenches. . . . You don't see me in the trenches, do you?'

'I'd rather see you there than in my own room,' Sylvia said. 'Any day!'

'Ah, there you are!' Perowne exclaimed with animation. 'What guarantee have I that if I do what you want I shall bask in your smile as you call it? I've got myself into a most awful hole, bringing you here without papers. You never told me you hadn't any papers. General O'Hara, the P.M., has raised a most awful strafe about it. . . . And what have I got for it? . . . Not the ghost of a smile. . . . And you should see old O'Hara's purple face! . . . Someone woke him from his afternoon nap to report to him about your heinous case and he hasn't recovered from the indigestion yet. . . . Besides, he hates Tietjens. . . . Tietjens is always chipping away at his military police. . . . O'Hara's lambs. . . .'

Sylvia was not listening, but she was smiling a slow smile at an inward thought. It maddened him.

'What's your game?' he exclaimed. 'Hell and hounds, what's your game? . . . You can't have come here to see . . . *him*. You don't come here to see me, as far as I can see. Well then . . .'

Sylvia looked round at him with all her eyes, wide open as if she had just awakened from a deep sleep.

'I didn't know I was coming,' she said. 'It came into my head to come suddenly. Ten minutes before I started. And I came. I didn't know papers were wanted. I suppose I

could have got them if I had wanted them. . . . You never asked me if I had any papers. You just froze on to me and had me into your special carriage. . . . I didn't know you were coming.'

That seemed to Perowne the last insult. He exclaimed:

'Oh, damn it, Sylvia! you *must* have known. . . . You were at the Quirks' squash on Wednesday evening. And *they* knew. My best friends.'

'Since you ask for it,' she said, 'I didn't know. . . . And I would not have come by that train if I had known you would be going by it. You force me to say rude things to you.' She added: 'Why can't you be more conciliatory?' to keep him quiet for a little. His jaw dropped down.

She was wondering where Christopher had got the money to pay for a bed at the hotel. Only a very short time before she had drawn all the balance of his banking account, except for a shilling. It was the middle of the month and he could not have drawn any more pay. . . . That, of course, was a try on her part. He might be forced into remonstrating. In the same way she had tried on the accusation that he had carried off her sheets. It was sheer wilfulness, and when she looked again at his motionless features she knew that she had been rather stupid. . . . But she was at the end of her tether: she had before now tried making accusations against her husband, but she had never tried inconveniencing him. . . . Now she suddenly realized the full stupidity of which she had been guilty. He would know perfectly well that those petty frightfulnesses of hers were not in the least her note; so he would know, too, that each of them was just a try on. He would say: 'She is trying to make me squeal. I'm damned if I will!'

She would have to adopt much more formidable methods. She said: 'He shall . . . he shall . . . he *shall* come to heel.'

Major Perowne had now closed his jaw. He was reflecting. Once he mumbled: 'More *conciliatory*! Holy smoke!'

She was feeling suddenly in spirits: it was the sight of Christopher had done it: the perfect assurance that they

were going to live under the same roof again. She would have betted all she possessed and her immortal soul on the chance that he would not take up with the Wannop girl. And it would have been betting on a certainty! . . . But she had had no idea what their relations were to be, after the war. At first she had thought that they had parted for good when she had gone off from their flat at four o'clock in the morning. It had seemed logical. But, gradually, in retreat at Birkenhead, in the still, white, nun's room, doubt had come upon her. It was one of the disadvantages of living as they did that they seldom spoke their thoughts. But that was also at times an advantage. She had certainly meant their parting to be for good. She had certainly raised her voice in giving the name of her station to the taxi-man with the pretty firm conviction that he would hear her; and she had been pretty well certain that he would take it as a sign that the breath had gone out of their union. . . . Pretty certain. But not quite! . . .

She would have died rather than write to him; she would die, now, rather than give any inkling that she wanted them to live under the same roof again. . . . She said to herself:

'Is he writing to that girl?' And then: 'No! . . . I'm certain that he isn't.' . . . She had had all his letters stopped at the flat, except for a few circulars that she let dribble through to him, so that he might imagine that all his correspondence was coming through. From the letters to him that she did read she was pretty sure that he had given no other address than the flat in Gray's Inn. . . . But there had been no letters from Valentine Wannop. . . . Two from Mrs. Wannop, two from his brother Mark, one from Port Scatho, one or two from brother officers and some official chits. . . . She said to herself that, if there *had* been any letters from that girl, she would have let all his letters go through, including the girl's. . . . Now she was not so certain that she would have.

In the glass she saw Christopher marching woodenly out of the hotel, along the path that led from door to door behind her. . . . It came to her with extraordinary gladness

—the absolute conviction that he was not corresponding with Miss Wannop. The absolute conviction. . . . If he had come alive enough to do that he would have looked different. She did not know how he would have looked. But different . . . Alive! Perhaps self-conscious: perhaps . . . satisfied . . .

For some time the major had been grumbling about his wrongs. He said that he followed her about all day, like a lap-dog, and got nothing for it. Now she wanted him to be conciliatory. She said she wanted to have a man on show as escort. Well then, an escort got something. . . . At just this moment he was beginning again with:

'Look here . . . will you let me come to your room to-night or will you not?'

She burst into high, loud laughter. He said:

'Damn it all, it isn't any laughing matter! . . . Look here! You don't know what I risk. . . . There are A.P.M.'s and P.M.'s and deputy sub-acting A.P.M.'s walking about the corridors of all the hotels in this town, all night long. . . . It's as much as my job is worth. . . .'

She put her handkerchief to her lips to hide a smile that she knew would be too cruel for him not to notice. And even when she took it away, he said:

'Hang it all, what a cruel-looking fiend you are! . . . Why the devil do I hang around you? . . . There's a picture that my mother's got, by Burne-Jones . . . A cruel-looking woman with a distant smile . . . Some vampire . . . La Belle Dame sans Merci . . . That's what you're like.'

She looked at him suddenly with considerable seriousness. . . .

'See here, Potty . . . ' she began. He groaned:

'I believe you'd like me to be sent to the beastly trenches. . . . Yet a big, distinguished-looking chap like me wouldn't have a chance. . . . At the first volley the Germans fired, they'd pick me off. . . .'

'Oh, Potty,' she exclaimed, 'try to be serious for a minute. . . . I tell you I'm a woman who's trying . . . who's desperately wanting . . . to be reconciled to her husband!'

... I would not tell that to another soul. ... I would not tell it to myself. ... But one owes something ... a parting scene, if nothing else. ... Well, something ... to a man one's been in bed with. ... I didn't give you a parting scene at ... ah, Yssingueux-les-Pervenches ... so I give you this tip instead. ...'

He said:

'Will you leave your bedroom door unlocked, or won't you?'

She said:

'If that man would throw his handkerchief to me, I would follow him round the world in my shift! ... Look here ... see me shake when I think of it. ...' She held out her hand at the end of her long arm: hand and arm trembled together, minutely, then very much. ... 'Well,' she finished, 'if you see that and still want to come to my room ... your blood be on your own head. ...' She paused for a breath or two and then said:

'You can come. ... I won't lock my door. ... But I don't say that you'll get anything ... or that you'll like what you get. ... That's a fair tip. ...' She added suddenly: '*You sale fat* ... take what you get and be damned to you!'

Major Perowne had suddenly taken to twirling his moustaches; he said:

'Oh, I'll chance the A.P.M.'s. ...'

She suddenly coiled her legs into her chair.

'I know now what I came here for,' she said.

Major Wilfrid Fosbrooke Eddicker Perowne of Perowne, the son of his mother, was one of those individuals who have no history, no strong proclivities, nothing. His knowledge seemed to be bounded by the contents of his newspaper for the immediate day; at any rate, his conversation never went any farther. He was not bold, he was not shy; he was neither markedly courageous nor markedly cowardly. His mother was immoderately wealthy, owned an immense castle that hung over crags, above a western sea, much as a bird-cage hangs from a window of a high tene-

ment building, but she received few or no visitors, her cuisine being indifferent and her wine atrocious. She had strong temperance opinions and, immediately after the death of her husband, she had emptied the contents of his cellar, which were almost as historic as his castle, into the sea, a shudder going through county-family England. But even this was not enough to make Perowne himself notorious.

His mother allowed him—after an eyeopener in early youth—the income of a junior royalty, but he did nothing with it. He lived in a great house in Palace Gardens, Kensington, and he lived all alone with rather a large staff of servants who had been selected by his mother, but they did nothing at all, for he ate all his meals, and even took his bath and dressed for dinner at the Bath Club. He was otherwise parsimonious.

He had, after the fashion of his day, passed a year or two in the army when young. He had been first gazetted to His Majesty's Forty-second Regiment, but on the Black Watch proceeding to India he had exchanged into the Glamorgan-shires, at that time commanded by General Campion and recruiting in and around Lincolnshire. The general had been an old friend of Perowne's mother, and, on being promoted to brigadier, had taken Perowne on to his staff as his galloper, for, although Perowne rode rather indifferently, he had a certain social knowledge and could be counted on to know how correctly to address a regimental invitation to a dowager countess who had married a viscount's third son. . . . As a military figure otherwise he had a very indifferent word of command, a very poor drill and next to no control of his men, but he was popular with his batmen, and in a rather stiff way was presentable in the old scarlet uniform or the blue mess jacket. He was exactly six-foot, to a hairbreadth, in his stockings, had very dark eyes, and a rather grating voice; the fact that his limbs were a shade too bulky for his trunk, which was not at all corpulent, made him appear a little clumsy. If in a club you asked what sort of a fellow he was your interlocutor

would tell you, most probably, that he had or was supposed to have warts on his head, this to account for his hair which all his life he had combed back, unparted from his forehead. But as a matter of fact he had no warts on his head.

He had once started out on an expedition to shoot big game in Portuguese East Africa. But on its arrival his expedition was met with the news that the natives of the interior were in revolt, so Perowne had returned to Kensington Palace Gardens. He had had several mild successes with women, but, owing to his habits of economy and fear of imbroglios, until the age of thirty-four, he had limited the field of his amours to young women of the lower social orders. . . .

His affair with Sylvia Tietjens might have been something to boast about, but he was not boastful, and indeed he had been too hard hit when she had left him even to bear to account lyingly for the employment of the time he had spent with her in Brittany. Fortunately no one took sufficient interest in his movements to wait for his answer to their indifferent questions as to where he had spent the summer. When his mind reverted to her desertion of him moisture would come out of his eyes, undemonstratively, as water leaves the surface of a sponge. . . .

Sylvia had left him by the simple expedient of stepping without so much as a reticule on to the little French tramway that took you to the main railway line. From there she had written to him in pencil on a closed correspondence card that she had left him because she simply could not bear either his dullness or his craking voice. She said they would probably run up against each other in the course of the autumn season in town and, after purchase of some night things, had made straight for the German spa to which her mother had retreated.

At the later date Sylvia had no difficulty in accounting to herself for her having gone off with such an oaf: she had simply reacted in a violent fit of sexual hatred, from her husband's mind. And she could not have found a mind

more utterly dissimilar than Perowne's in any decently groomed man to be found in London. She could recall, even in the French hotel lounge, years after, the almost painful emotion of joyful hatred that had visited her when she had first thought of going off with him. It was the self-applause of one who has just hit upon an excruciatingly inspiring intellectual discovery. In her previous transitory infidelities to Christopher she had discovered that, however presentable the man with whom she might have been having an affair, and however short the affair, even if it were only a matter of a week-end . . . Christopher had spoiled her for the other man. It was the most damnable of his qualities that to hear any other man talk of any subject—any, any subject—from stable form to the balance of power, or from the voice of a given opera singer to the recurrence of a comet—to have to pass a week-end with any other man and hear his talk after having spent the inside of the week with Christopher, hate his ideas how you might, was the difference between listening to a grown man and, with an intense boredom, trying to entertain an inarticulate schoolboy. As beside him, other men simply did not seem ever to have grown up. . . .

Just before, with an extreme suddenness, consenting to go away with Perowne, the illuminating idea had struck her: If I did go away with him it would be the most humiliating thing I could do to Christopher. . . . And just when the idea *had* struck her, beside her chair in the conservatory at a dance given by the general's sister, Lady Claudine Sandbach, Perowne, his voice rendered more throaty and less disagreeable than usual by emotion, had been going on and on begging her to elope with him. . . . She had suddenly said:

'Very well . . . let's . . .'

His emotion had been so unbridled in its astonishment that she had, even at that, almost been inclined to treat her own speech as a joke and to give up the revenge. . . . But the idea of the humiliation that Christopher must feel proved too much for her. For, for your wife to throw you

over for an attractive man is naturally humiliating, but that she should leave you publicly for a man of hardly any intelligence at all, you priding yourself on your brains, must be nearly as mortifying a thing as can happen to you.

But she had hardly set out upon her escapade before two very serious defects in her plan occurred to her with extreme force: the one that, however humiliated Christopher might feel, she would not be with him to witness his humiliation; the other that, oaf as she had taken Perowne to be in casual society, in close daily relationship he was such an oaf as to be almost insufferable. She had imagined that he would prove a person out of whom it might be possible to make *something* by a judicious course of alternated mothering and scorn: she discovered that his mother had already done for him almost all that woman could do. For, when he had been an already rather backward boy at a private school, his mother had kept him so extremely short of pocket-money that he had robbed other boys' desks of a few shillings here and there—in order to subscribe towards a birthday present for the headmaster's wife. His mother, to give him a salutary lesson, had given so much publicity to the affair that he had become afflicted with a permanent bent towards shyness that rendered him by turns very mistrustful of himself or very boastful and, although he repressed manifestations of either tendency towards the outside world, the continual repression rendered him almost incapable of any vigorous thought or action. . . .

That discovery did not soften Sylvia towards him: it was, as she expressed it, *his* funeral and, although she would have been ready for any normal job of smartening up a roughish man, she was by no means prepared to readjust other women's hopeless maternal misfits.

So she had got no farther than Ostend, where they had proposed to spend a week or so at the tables, before she found herself explaining to some acquaintances whom she met that she was in that gay city merely for an hour or two, between trains, on the way to join her mother in a German health resort. The impulse to say that had come upon her

by surprise, for, until that moment, being completely indifferent to criticism, she had intended to cast no veil at all over her proceedings. But, quite suddenly, on seeing some well-known English faces in the casino it had come over her to think that, however much she imagined Christopher to be humiliated by her going off with an oaf like Perowne, that humiliation must be as nothing compared with that which she might be expected to feel at having found no one better than an oaf like Perowne to go off with. Moreover . . . she began to miss Christopher.

These feelings did not grow any less intense in the rather stuffy but inconspicuous hotel in the Rue St Roque in Paris to which she immediately transported the bewildered but uncomplaining Perowne, who had imagined that he was to be taken to Wiesbaden for a course of light gaieties. And Paris, when you avoid the more conspicuous resorts, and when you are unprovided with congenial companionship, can prove nearly as overwhelming as is, say, Birmingham on a Sunday.

So that Sylvia waited for only just long enough to convince herself that her husband had no apparent intention of applying for an immediate divorce and had, indeed, no apparent intention of doing anything at all. She sent him, that is to say, a postcard saying that all letters and other communications would reach her at her inconspicuous hotel—and it mortified her not a little to have to reveal the fact that her hotel was so inconspicuous. But, except that her own correspondence was forwarded to her with regularity, no communications at all came from Tietjens.

In an air-resort in the centre of France to which she next removed Perowne, she found herself considering rather seriously what it might be expected that Tietjens *would* do. Through indirect and unsuspecting allusions in letters from her personal friends she found that if Tietjens did not put up, he certainly did not deny, the story that she had gone to nurse or be with her mother, who was supposed to be seriously ill. . . . That is to say, her friends said how rotten it was that her mother, Mrs Satterthwaite, should

be so seriously ill; how rotten it must be for her to be shut up in a potty little German kur-ort when the world could be so otherwise amusing; and how well Christopher whom they saw from time to time seemed to be getting on considering how rotten it must be for him to be left all alone. . . .

At about this time Perowne began to become, if possible, more irritating than ever. In their air-resort, although the guests were almost entirely French, there was a newly opened golf-course, and at the game of golf Perowne displayed an inefficiency and at the same time a morbid conceit that were surprising in one naturally lymphatic. He would sulk for a whole evening if either Sylvia or any Frenchman beat him in a round, and, though Sylvia was by then completely indifferent to his sulking, what was very much worse was that he became gloomily and loud-voicedly quarrelsome over his games with foreign opponents.

Three events, falling within ten minutes of each other, made her determined to get as far away from that air-resort as was feasible. In the first place she observed at the end of the street some English people called Thurston, whose faces she faintly knew, and the emotion she suddenly felt let her know how extremely anxious she was that she should let it remain feasible for Tietjens to take her back. Then, in the golf club-house, to which she found herself fiercely hurrying in order to pay her bill and get her clubs, she overheard the conversation of two players that left no doubt in her mind that Perowne had been detected in little meannesses of moving his ball at golf or juggling with his score. . . . This was almost more than she could stand. And, at the same moment, her mind, as it were, condescended to let her remember Christopher's voice as it had once uttered the haughty opinion that no man one could speak to would ever think of divorcing any woman. If he could not defend the sanctity of his hearth he must lump it unless the woman wanted to divorce him. . . .

At the time when he had said it her mind—she had been

just then hating him a good deal—had seemed to take no notice of the utterance. But now that it presented itself forcibly to her again it brought with it the thought: Supposing he wasn't really only talking through his hat!

... She dragged the wretched Perowne off his bed where he had been lost in an after-lunch slumber and told him that they must both leave that place at once, and, that as soon as they reached Paris or some larger town where he could find waiters and people to understand his French, she herself was going to leave him for good. They did not, in consequence, get away from the air-resort until the six o'clock train next morning. Perowne's passion of rage and despair at the news that she wished to leave him took an inconvenient form, for instead of announcing any intention of committing suicide, as might have been expected, he became gloomily and fantastically murderous. He said that unless Sylvia swore on a little relic of St Anthony she carried that she had no intention of leaving him he would incontinently kill her. He said, as he said for the rest of his days, that she had ruined his life and caused great moral deterioration in himself. But for her he might have married some pure young thing. Moreover, influencing him against his mother's doctrines, she had forced him to drink wine, by an effect of pure scorn. Thus he had done harm, he was convinced, both to his health and to his manly proportions. . . . It was indeed for Sylvia one of the most unbearable things about this man—the way he took wine. With every glass he put to his lips he would exclaim with an unbearable titter some such imbecility as: Here is another nail in my coffin. And he had taken to wine, and even to stronger liquor, very well.

Sylvia had refused to swear by St Anthony. She definitely was not going to introduce the saint into her amorous affairs, and she definitely was not going to take on any relic an oath that she meant to break at an early opportunity. There was such a thing as playing it too low down: there are dishonours to which death is preferable. So, getting hold of his revolver at a time when he was wringing

his hands, she dropped it into the water-jug and then felt reasonably safe.

Perowne knew no French and next to nothing about France, but he had discovered that the French did nothing to you for killing a woman who intended to leave you. Sylvia, on the other hand, was pretty certain that, without a weapon, he could not do much to her. If she had had no other training at her very expensive school she had had so much drilling in calisthenics as to be singularly mistress of her limbs, and, in the interests of her beauty she had always kept herself very fit. . . .

She said at last:

'Very well. We will go to Yssingueux-les-Pervenches. . . .'

A rather pleasant French couple in the hotel had spoken of this little place in the extreme west of France as a lonely paradise, they having spent their honeymoon there. . . . And Sylvia wanted a lonely paradise if there was going to be any scrapping before she got away from Perowne. . . .

She had no hesitation as to what she was going to do: the long journey across half France by miserable trains had caused her an agony of home-sickness! Nothing less! . . . It was a humiliating disease from which to suffer. But it was unavoidable, like mumps. You had to put up with it. Besides, she even found herself wanting to see her child, whom she imagined herself to hate, as having been the cause of all her misfortunes. . . .

She therefore prepared, after great thought, a letter telling Tietjens that she intended to return to him. She made the letter as nearly as possible like one she would write announcing her return from a country house to which she should have been invited for an indefinite period, and she added some rather hard instructions about her maid, these being intended to remove from the letter any possible trace of emotion. She was certain that, if she showed any emotion at all, Christopher would never take her under his roof again. . . . She was pretty certain that no gossip had been caused by her escapade. Major Thurston had been at the railway station when they had left, but they had not

spoken—and Thurston was a very decentish, brown-moustached fellow, of the sort that does not gossip.

It had proved a little difficult to get away, for Perowne during several weeks watched her like an attendant in a lunatic asylum. But at last the idea presented itself to him that she would never go without her frocks, and, one day, in a fit of intense somnolence after a lunch, washed down with rather a large quantity of the local and fiery cordial, he let her take a walk alone. . . .

She was by that time tired of men . . . or she imagined that she was; for she was not prepared to be certain, considering the muckers she saw women coming all round her over the most unpresentable individuals. Men, at any rate never fulfilled expectations. They might, upon acquaintance, turn out more entertaining than they appeared; but almost always taking up with a man was like reading a book you had read when you had forgotten that you had read it. You had not been for ten minutes in any sort of intimacy with any man before you said: 'But I've read all this before. . . .' You knew the opening, you were already bored by the middle, and, especially, you knew the end. . . .

She remembered, years ago, trying to shock her mother's spiritual adviser, Father Conssett, whom they had lately murdered in Ireland, along with Casement. . . . The poor saint had not in the least been shocked. He had gone her one better. For when she had said something like that her idea of a divvy life—they used in those days to say divvy—would be to go off with a different man every week-end, he had told her that after a short time she would be bored already by the time the poor dear fellow was buying the railway ticket. . . .

And, by heavens, he had been right. . . . For when she came to think of it, from the day that poor saint had said that thing in her mother's sitting-room in the little German spa—Lobscheid, it must have been called—in the candle-light, his shadow denouncing her from all over the walls, to now when she sat in the palmish brickwork of that

hotel that had been new-whitely decorated to celebrate hostilities, never once had she sat in a train with a man who had any right to look upon himself as justified in mauling her about. . . . She wondered if, from where he sat in heaven, Father Consett would be satisfied with her as he looked down into that lounge. . . . Perhaps it was really he that had pulled off that change in her. . . .

Never once till yesterday. . . . For perhaps the unfortunate Perowne might just faintly have had the right yesterday to make himself for about two minutes—before she froze him into a choking, pallid snowman with goggle eyes—the perfectly loathsome thing that a man in a railway train becomes. . . . Much too bold and yet stupidly awkward with the fear of the guard looking in at the window, the train doing over sixty, without corridors. . . . No, never again for *me*, father, she addressed her voice towards the ceiling. . . .

Why in the world couldn't you get a man to go away with you and be just—oh, light comedy—for a whole, a whole blessed week-end. For a whole blessed life. . . . Why not? . . . Think of it. . . . A whole blessed life with a good sort and yet didn't go all gurgly in the voice, and cod-fish-eyed and all-overish—to the extent of not being able to find the tickets when asked for them. . . . Father, dear, she said again upwards, if I could find men like that, that would be just heaven . . . where there is no marrying. . . . But, of course, she went on almost resignedly, he would not be faithful to you. . . . And then: one would have to stand it. . . .

She sat up so suddenly in her chair that beside her, too, Major Perowne nearly jumped out of his wicker-work, and asked if *he* had come back. . . . She exclaimed:

'No, I'd be damned if I would. . . . I'd be damned, I'd be damned, I'd be damned if I would. . . . Never. Never. By the living God!'

She asked fiercely of the agitated major:

'Has Christopher got a girl in this town? . . . You'd better tell me the truth!'

The major mumbled:

'He . . . No . . . He's too much of a stick . . . He never even goes to Suzette's . . . Except once to fetch out some miserable little squirt of a subaltern who was smashing up Mother Hardelot's furniture . . .'

He grumbled:

'But you shouldn't give a man the jumps like that! . . . Be conciliatory, you said . . .' He went on to grumble that her manners had not improved since she had been at Yssingueux-les-Pervenches, . . . and then went on to tell her that in French the words *yeux des pervenches* meant eyes of periwinkle blue. And that was the only French he knew, because a Frenchman he had met in the train had told him so and he had always thought that if *her* eyes had been periwinkle blue . . . 'But you're not listening. . . . Hardly polite, I call it,' he had mumbled to a conclusion. . . .

She was sitting forward in her chair still clenching her hand under her chin at the thought that perhaps Christopher had Valentine Wannop in that town. That was perhaps why he elected to remain there. She asked:

'Why does Christopher stay on in this God-forsaken hole? . . . The inglorious base, they call it. . . .'

'Because he's jolly well got to. . . ' Major Perowne said. 'He's got to do what he's told. . . .'

She said: 'Christopher! . . . You mean to say they'd keep a man like *Christopher* anywhere he didn't want to be. . . .'

'They'd jolly well knock spots off him if he went away,' Major Perowne exclaimed. . . . 'What the deuce do you think your blessed fellow is? . . . The King of England? . . .' He added with a sudden sombre ferocity: 'They'd shoot him like anybody else if he bolted. . . . What do *you* think?'

She said: 'But all that wouldn't prevent his having a girl in this town?'

'Well, he hasn't got one,' Perowne said. 'He sticks up in that blessed old camp of his like a blessed she-chicken sitting on addled eggs. . . . That's what they say of him. . . . I don't know anything about the fellow. . . .'

Listening vindictively and indolently, she thought she caught in his droning tones a touch of the homicidal lunacy that had used to underlie his voice in the bedroom at Yssingueux. The fellow had undoubtedly about him a touch of the dull, mad murderer of the police-courts. With a sudden animation she thought:

‘Suppose he tried to murder Christopher. . . .’ And she imagined her husband breaking the fellow’s back across his knee, the idea going across her mind as fire traverses the opal. Then, with a dry throat, she said to herself:

‘I’ve got to find out whether he has that girl in Rouen . . .’ Men stuck together. The fellow Perowne might well be protecting Tietjens. It would be unthinkable that any rules of the service could keep Christopher in that place. They could not shut up the upper classes. If Perowne had any sense he would know that to shield Tietjens was the way not to get her. . . . But he had no sense. . . . Besides, sexual solidarity was a terribly strong thing. . . . She knew that she herself would not give a woman’s secrets away in order to get her man. Then . . . how was she to ascertain whether the girl was not in that town? How? . . . She imagined Tietjens going home every night to her. . . . But he was going to spend that night with herself. . . . She knew that. . . . Under that roof. . . . Fresh from the other. . . .

She imagined him there, now. . . . In the parlour of one of the little villas you see from the tram on the top of the town. . . . They were undoubtedly, now, discussing her. . . . Her whole body writhed, muscle on muscle, in her chair. . . . She must discover. . . . But how do you discover? Against a universal conspiracy. . . . This whole war was an agapemone. . . . You went to war when you desired to rape innumerable women. . . . It was what war was for. . . . All these men, crowded in this narrow space. . . . She stood up:

‘I’m going,’ she said, ‘to put on a little powder for Lady Sachse’s feast. . . . You needn’t stay if you don’t want to. . . .’ She was going to watch every face she saw until it gave up the secret of where in that town Christopher had

the Wannop girl hidden. . . . She imagined her freckled, snubnosed faced pressed—squashed was the word—against his cheek. . . . She was going to investigate. . . .

II

She found an early opportunity to carry on her investigations. For, at dinner that night, she found herself, Tietjens having gone to the telephone with a lance-corporal, opposite what she took to be a small tradesman, with fresh-coloured cheeks, and a great, grey, forward-sprouting moustache, in a uniform so creased that the creases resembled the veins of a leaf. . . . A very trustworthy small tradesman: the grocer from round the corner whom, sometimes, you allow to supply you with paraffin. . . . He was saying to her:

‘If, ma’am, you multiply two-thousand nine hundred and something by ten you arrive at twenty-nine thousand odd. . . .’

And she had exclaimed:

‘You really mean that my husband, Captain Tietjens, spent yesterday afternoon in examining twenty-nine thousand toe-nails. . . . And two thousand nine hundred toothbrushes. . . .’

‘I told him,’ her interlocutor answered with deep seriousness, ‘that these being Colonial troops it was not so necessary to examine their toothbrushes. . . . Imperial troops *will* use the brush they clean their buttons with for their teeth so as to have a clean toothbrush to show the medical officer. . . .’

‘It sounds,’ she said with a little shudder, ‘as if you were all schoolboys playing a game. . . . And you say my husband really occupies his mind with such things. . . .’

Second-Lieutenant Cowley, dreadfully conscious that the shoulder-strap of his Sam Browne belt, purchased that afternoon at the Ordnance, and therefore brand-new, did not match the abdominal part of the belt that he had had

for nearly ten years—a splendid bit of leather, that!—answered nevertheless stoutly:

‘Madam! If the brains of an army aren’t, the life of an army *is* . . . in its feet. . . . And nowadays, the medical officers say, in its teeth. . . . Your husband, ma’am, is an admirable officer. . . . He says that no draft he turns out shall. . . .’

She said:

‘He spent three hours in . . . You say, foot and kit inspection. . . .’

Second-Lieutenant Cowley said:

‘Of course he had other officers to help him with the kit . . . but he looked at every foot himself. . . .’

She said:

‘That took him from two till five. . . . Then he had tea, I suppose. . . . And went to . . . What is it? . . . The papers of the draft. . . .’

Second-Lieutenant Cowley said, muffled through his moustache:

‘If the captain is a little remiss in writing letters . . . I *have* heard. . . . You might, madam . . . I’m a married man myself . . . with a daughter. . . . And the army is not very good at writing letters. . . . You might say, in that respect, that thank God we have got a navy, ma’am. . . .’

She let him stagger on for a sentence or two, imagining that, in his confusion, she might come upon traces of Miss Wannop in Rouen. Then she said handsomely:

‘Of course you have explained everything, Mr. Cowley, and I am very much obliged. . . . Of course my husband would not have time to write very full letters. . . . He is not like the giddy young subalterns who run after . . .’

He exclaimed in a great roar of laughter:

‘The captain run after skirts. . . . Why, I can number on my hands the times he’s been out of my sight since he’s had the battalion!’

A deep wave of depression went over Sylvia.

‘Why,’ Lieutenant Cowley laughed on, ‘if we *had* a laugh against him it was that he mothered the lot of us as if he

was a hen sitting on addled eggs. . . . For it's only a rag-time army, as the saying is, when you've said the best for it that you can. . . . And look at the other commanding officers we've had before we had him. . . . There was Major Brooks. . . . Never up before noon, if then, and out of camp by two-thirty. Get your returns ready for signing before then or never get 'em signed. . . . And Colonel Potter. . . . Bless my soul. . . . 'e wouldn't sign any blessed papers at all. . . . He lived down here in this hotel, and we never saw him up at the camp at all. . . . But the captain. . . . We always say that. . . . if 'e was a Chelsea adjutant getting off a draft of the Second Coldstreams. . . .'

With her indolent and gracious beauty—Sylvia knew that she was displaying indolent and gracious beauty—Sylvia leaned over the tablecloth listening for items in the terrible indictment that, presently, she was going to bring against Tietjens. . . . For the morality of these matters is this: . . . If you have an incomparably beautiful woman on your hands you must occupy yourself solely with her. . . . Nature exacts that of you . . . until you are unfaithful to her with a snubnosed girl with freckles: that, of course, being a reaction, is still in a way occupying yourself with your woman! . . . But to betray her with a battalion. . . . That is against decency, against Nature. . . . And for him, Christopher Tietjens, to come down to the level of the men you met here! . . .

Tietjens, mooning down the room between tables, had more than his usually aloof air since he had just come out of a telephone box. He slipped, a weary mass, into the polished chair between her and the lieutenant. He said:

'I've got the washing arranged for. . . .' and Sylvia gave to herself a little hiss between the teeth, of vindictive pleasure! This was indeed betrayal to a battalion. He added: 'I shall have to be up in camp before four-thirty to-morrow morning. . . .'

Sylvia could not resist saying:

'Isn't there a poem. . . . *Ah me, the dawn, the dawn, it*

comes too soon! . . . said of course by lovers in bed? . . . Who was the poet?

Cowley went visibly red to the roots of his hair and evidently beyond. Tietjens finished his speech to Cowley, who had remonstrated against his going up to the camp so early by saying that he had not been able to get hold of an officer to march the draft. He then said in his leisurely way:

'There were a great many poems with that refrain in the Middle Ages. . . . You are probably thinking of an albade by Arnaut Daniel, which someone translated lately. . . . An albade was a song to be sung at dawn when, presumably, no one but lovers would be likely to sing. . . .'

'Will there,' Sylvia asked, 'be anyone but you singing up in your camp to-morrow at four?'

She could not help it. . . . She knew that Tietjens had adopted his slow pomposity in order to give the grotesque object at the table with them time to recover from his confusion. She hated him for it. What right had he to make himself appear a pompous ass in order to shield the confusion of anybody?

The second-lieutenant came out of his confusion to exclaim, actually slapping his thigh:

'There you are, madam. . . . Trust the captain to know everything! . . . I don't believe there's a question under the sun you could ask him that he couldn't answer. . . . They say up at the camp. . . .' He went on with long stories of all the questions Tietjens *had* answered up at the camp. . . .

Emotion was going all over Sylvia . . . at the proximity of Tietjens. She said to herself: 'Is this to go on for ever?' Her hands were ice-cold. She touched the back of her left hand with the fingers of her right. It *was* ice-cold. She looked at her hands. They were bloodless. . . . She said to herself: 'It's pure sexual passion . . . it's pure sexual passion . . . God! Can't I get over this?' She said: 'Father! . . . You used to be fond of Christopher. . . . *Get* our Lady to get me over this. . . . It's the ruin of him and the ruin of

me. But, oh *damn*, don't! . . . For it's all I have to live for . . .' She said: 'When he came mooning back from the telephone I thought it was all right. . . . I thought what a heavy wooden-horse he looked. . . . For two minutes. . . . Then it's all over me again. . . . I want to swallow my saliva and I can't. My throat won't work. . . .'

She leaned one of her white bare arms on the tablecloth towards the walrus-moustache that was still snuffling gloriously:

'They used to call him Old Sol at school,' she said. 'But there's one question of Solomon's he could not answer. . . . The one about the way of a man with . . . Oh, a maid! . . . Ask him what happened before the dawn ninety-six—no, ninety-eight days ago. . . .'

She said to herself: 'I can't help it. . . . Oh, I *can't* help it. . . .'

The ex-sergeant-major was exclaiming happily:

'Oh, no one ever said the captain was one of these thought-readers. . . . It's real solid knowledge of men and things he has. . . . Wonderful how he knows the men considering he was not born in the service. . . . But there, your born gentleman mixes with men all his days and knows them. Down to the ground and inside their puttees. . . .'

Tietjens was looking straight in front of him, his face perfectly expressionless.

'But I bet I got him. . . .' she said to herself and then to the sergeant-major:

'I suppose now an army officer—one of your born gentlemen—when a back-from-leave train goes out from any of the great stations—Paddington, say—to the front. . . . He knows how all the men are feeling. . . . But not what the married women think . . . or the . . . the girl. . . .'

She said to herself: 'Damn it, how clumsy I am getting! . . . I used to be able to take his hide off with a word. Now I take sentences at a time. . . .'

She went on with her uninterrupted sentence to Cowley:

'Of course he may never be going to see his only son

again, so it makes him sensitive. . . . The officer at Paddington, I mean. . . .’

She said to herself: ‘By God, if that beast does not give in to me to-night he never *shall* see Michael again. . . . Ah, but I got him. . . .’ Tietjens had his eyes closed, round each of his high-coloured nostrils a crescent of whiteness was beginning. And increasing. . . . She felt a sudden alarm and held the edge of the table with her extended arm to steady herself. . . . Men went white at the nose like that when they were going to faint. . . . She did not want him to faint. . . . But he *had* noticed the word Paddington. . . . Ninety-eight days before. . . . She had counted every day since. . . . She had got that much information. . . . She had said *Paddington* outside the house at dawn and he had taken it as a farewell. He *had*. . . . He had imagined himself free to do what he liked with the girl. . . . Well, he wasn’t. . . . That was why he was white about the gills. . . .

Cowley exclaimed loudly:

‘Paddington! . . . It isn’t from there that back-from-leave trains go. Not for the front: the B.E.F. . . . Not from Paddington. . . . The Glamorganshires go from there to the depot. . . . And the Liverpools. . . . They’ve got a depot at Birkenhead. . . . Or is that the Cheshires? . . .’ He asked of Tietjens: ‘Is it the Liverpools or the Cheshires that have a depot at Birkenhead, sir? . . . You remember we recruited a draft from there when we were at Penhally. . . . At any rate, you go to Birkenhead from Paddington. . . . I was never there myself. . . . They say it’s a nice place. . . .’

Sylvia said—she did not want to say it:

‘It’s quite a nice place . . . but I should not think of staying there for ever. . . .’

Tietjens said:

‘The Cheshires have a training camp—not a depot—near Birkenhead. And of course there are R.G.A.’s there. . . .’ She had been looking away from him. . . . Cowley exclaimed:

‘You were nearly off, sir,’ hilariously. ‘You had your

peepers shut. . . .’ Lifting a champagne glass, he inclined himself towards her. ‘You must excuse the captain, ma’am,’ he said. ‘He had no sleep last night. . . . Largely owing to my fault. . . . Which is what makes it so kind of him. . . . I tell you, ma’am, there are few things I would not do for the captain. . . .’ He drank his champagne and began an explanation: ‘You may not know, ma’am, this is a great day for me. . . . And you and the captain are making it the greatest day of my life. . . .’ Why, at four this morning there hadn’t been a wretcheder man in Ruin town. . . . And now . . . He must tell her that he suffered from an unfortunate—a miserable—complaint. . . . One that makes one have to be careful of celebrations. . . . And to-day was a day that he had to celebrate. . . . But he dare not have done it where Sergeant-Major Ledoux is along with a lot of their old mates. . . . ‘I dare not. . . . I dussn’t!’ he finished. . . . ‘So I might have been sitting, now, at this very moment, up in the cold camp. . . . But for you and the captain. . . . Up in the cold camp. . . . You’ll excuse me, ma’am. . . .’

Sylvia felt that her lids were suddenly wavering:

‘I might have been myself,’ she said, ‘in a cold camp, too . . . if I hadn’t thrown myself on the captain’s mercy! . . . At Birkenhead, you know. . . . I happened to be there till three weeks ago. . . . It’s strange that you mentioned it. . . . There *are* things like signs . . . but you’re not a Catholic! They could hardly be coincidences. . . .’

She was trembling. . . . She looked, fumblingly opening it, into the little mirror of her powder-box—of chased, very thin gold with a small blue stone, like a forget-me-not in the centre of the concentric engravings. . . . Drake—the possible father of Michael—had given it to her. . . . The first thing he had ever given her. She had brought it down to-night out of defiance. She imagined that Tietjens disliked it. . . . She said breathlessly to herself: perhaps the damn thing is an ill omen. . . . Drake had been the first man who had ever . . . A hot-breathed brute! . . . In the little glass her features were chalk-white. . . . She looked

like . . . she looked like . . . She had a dress of golden tissue. . . . The breath was short between her white set teeth. . . . Her face was as white as her teeth. . . . And . . . Yes! Nearly! Her lips. . . . What was her face like? . . . In the chapel of the convent of Birkenhead there was a tomb all of alabaster. . . . She said to herself:

'He was near fainting. . . . I'm near fainting. . . . What's this beastly thing that's between us? . . . If I let myself faint. . . . But it would not make that beast's face any less wooden! . . .'

She leaned across the table and patted the ex-sergeant-major's black-haired hand:

'I'm sure,' she said, 'you're a very good man . . .' She did not try to keep the tears out of her eyes, remembering his words: 'Up in the cold camp.' . . . 'I'm glad the captain, as you call him, did not leave you in the cold camp. . . . You're devoted to him, aren't you? . . . There are others he does leave . . . up in . . . the cold camp. . . . For punishment, you know. . . .'

The ex-sergeant-major, the tears in his eyes too, said: 'Well, there is men you 'as to give the C.B. to. . . C.B. means confined to barracks. . . .'

'Oh, there are!' she exclaimed. 'There are! . . . And women, too. . . . Surely there are women, too? . . .'

The sergeant-major said:

'Wacks, per'aps. . . . I don't know. . . . They say women's discipline is like ours. . . . Founded on hours!'

She said:

'Do you know what they used to say of the captain? . . .' She said to herself: 'I pray to God the stiff, fatuous beast likes sitting here listening to this stuff. . . . Blessed Virgin, mother of God, make him take me. . . . Before midnight. Before eleven. . . . As soon as we get rid of this . . . No, he's a decent little man. . . . Blessed Virgin!' . . . 'Do you know what they used to say of the captain? . . . I heard the warmest banker in England say it of him. . . .'

The sergeant-major, his eyes enormously opened, said:

'Did you know the warmest banker in England? . . .'

But there, we always knew the captain was well connected ...' She went on:

'They said of him. . . . He was always helping people.' . . . 'Holy Mary, mother of God! . . . He's my *husband*. . . . It's not a sin. . . . Before midnight. . . . Oh, give me a sign. . . . Or before . . . the termination of hostilities. . . . If you give me a sign I could wait.' . . . 'He helped virtuous Scotch students, and broken-down gentry. . . . And women taken in adultery. . . . All of them. . . . Like . . . You know Who. . . . That is his model. . . .' She said to herself: 'Curse him! . . . I hope he likes it. . . . You'd think the only thing he thinks about is the beastly duck he's wolfing down.' . . . And then aloud: 'They used to say: "He saved others; himself he could not save. . . ."'

The ex-sergeant-major looked at her gravely:

'Ma'am,' he said, 'we couldn't say exactly that of the captain. . . . For I fancy it was said of our Redeemer. . . . But we *'ave* said that if ever there was a poor bloke the captain could 'elp, 'elp 'im 'e would. . . . Yet the unit was always getting 'ellish strafe from headquarters. . . .'

Suddenly Sylvia began to laugh. . . . As she began to laugh she had remembered . . . The alabaster image in the nun's chapel at Birkenhead the vision of which had just presented itself to her, had been the recumbent tomb of an honourable Mrs Tremayne-Warlock. . . . She was said to have sinned in her youth . . . And her husband had never forgiven her. . . . That was what the nuns said. . . . She said aloud:

'A sign. . . .' Then to herself: 'Blessed Mary! . . . You've given it me in the neck. . . . Yet you could not name a father for your child, and I can name two. . . . I'm going mad. . . . Both I and he are going to go mad. . . .'

She thought of dashing an enormous patch of red upon either cheek. Then she thought it would be rather melodramatic. . . .

She made in the smoking-room, whilst she was waiting for both Tietjens and Cowley to come back from the telephone, another pact. . . . This time with Father Conssett

in heaven! She was fairly sure that Father Conssett—and quite possibly other of the heavenly powers—wanted Christopher not to be worried, so that he could get on with the war—or because he was a good sort of dullish man such as the heavenly authorities are apt to like. . . . Something like that. . . .

She was by that time fairly calm again. You cannot keep up fits of emotion by the hour: at any rate, with her, the fits of emotion were periodical and unexpected, though her colder passion remained always the same. . . . Thus, when Christopher had come into Lady Sachse's that afternoon, she had been perfectly calm. He had mooned through a number of officers, both French and English, in a great octagonal, bluish salon where Lady Sachse gave her teas, and had come to her side with just a nod—the merest inflexion of the head! . . . Perowne had melted away somewhere behind the disagreeable duchess. The general, very splendid and white-headed and scarlet-tipped and gilt, had also borne down upon her at that. . . . At the sight of Perowne with her he had been sniffing and snorting whilst he talked to the young nobleman—a dark fellow in blue with a new belt who seemed just a shade too theatrical, he being chauffeur to a marshal of France and first cousin and nearest relative, except for parents and grandparents, of the prospective bride. . . .

The general had told her that he was running the show pretty strong on purpose because he thought it might do something to cement the Entente Cordiale. But it did not seem to be doing it. The French—officers, soldiers and women—kept pretty well all on the one side of the room—the English on the other. The French were as a rule more gloomy than men and women are expected to be. A marquis of sorts—she understood that these were all Bonapartist nobility—having been introduced to her had distinguished himself no more than by saying that, for his part, he thought the duchess was right, and by saying that to Perowne who, knowing no French, had choked exactly

as if his tongue had suddenly got too big for his mouth. . . .

She had not heard what the duchess—a very disagreeable duchess who sat on a sofa and appeared savagely careworn—had been saying, so that she had inclined herself, in the courtly manner that at school she had been taught to reserve for the French legitimist nobility, but that she thought she might expend upon a rather state function even for the Bonapartists, and had replied that without the least doubt the duchess had the right of the matter. . . . The marquis had given her from dark eyes one long glance, and she had returned it with a long cold glance that certainly told him she was meat for his masters. It extinguished him. . . .

Tietjens had staged his meeting with herself remarkably well. It was the sort of lymphatic thing he *could* do, so that, for the fifth of a minute, she wondered if he had any feelings or emotions at all. But she knew that he had. . . . The general, at any rate, bearing down upon them with satisfaction, had remarked:

‘Ah, I see you’ve seen each other before to-day. . . . I thought perhaps you wouldn’t have found time before, Tietjens. . . . Your draft must be a great nuisance. . . .’

Tietjens said without expression:

‘Yes, we have seen each other before. . . . I made time to call at Sylvia’s hotel, sir.’

It was at Tietjens’ terrifying expressionlessness, at that completely being up to a situation, that the first wave of emotion had come over her. . . . For, till that very moment, she had been merely sardonically making the constataction that there was not a single presentable man in the room. . . . There was not even one that you could call a gentleman . . . for you cannot size up the French . . . ever! . . . But, suddenly, she was despairing! . . . How, she said to herself, could she ever move, put emotion into, this lump! It was like trying to move an immense mattress filled with feathers. You pulled at one end, but the whole mass sagged down and remained immobile until you seemed to have no

strength at all. . . . Until virtue went out from you. . . .

It was as if he had the evil eye; or some special protector. He was so appallingly competent, so appallingly always in the centre of his own picture.

The general said, rather joyfully:

'Then you can spare a minute, Tietjens, to talk to the duchess! About coal! . . . For goodness' sake, man, save the situation! I'm worn out. . . .'

Sylvia bit the inside of her lower lip—she never bit her lip itself!—to keep herself from exclaiming aloud. It was just exactly what should not happen to Tietjens at that juncture. . . . She heard the general explaining to her, in his courtly manner, that the duchess was holding up the whole ceremony because of the price of coal. The general loved her desperately. Her, Sylvia! In quite a proper manner for an elderly general. . . . But he would go to no small extremes in her interests! So would his sister!

She looked hard at the room to get her senses into order again. She said:

'It's like a Hogarth picture. . . .'

The undissolvable air of the eighteenth century that the French contrive to retain in all their effects kept the scene singularly together. On a sofa sat the duchess, relatives leaning over her. She was a duchess with one of those impossible names: Beauchain-Radigutz or something like it. The bluish room was octagonal and vaulted, up to a rosette in the centre of the ceiling. English officers and V.A.D.'s of some evident presence opened out to the left, French military and very black-clothed women of all ages, but all apparently widows, opened out to the right, as if the duchess shone down a sea at sunset. Beside her on the sofa you did not see Lady Sachse: leaning over her you did not see the prospective bride. This stoutish, unpresentable, coldly venomous woman, in black clothes so shabby that they might have been grey tweed, extinguished other personalities as the sun conceals planets. A fattish, brilliant personality, in mufti, with a scarlet rosette, stood sideways to the duchess's right, his hands extended forward

as if in an invitation to a dance; an extremely squat lady, also apparently a widow, extended, on the left of the duchess, both her black-gloved hands, as if she too were giving an invitation to the dance. . . .

The general, with Sylvia beside him, stood glorious in the centre of the clearing that led to the open doorway of a much smaller room. Through the doorway you could see a table with a white damask cloth; a silver-gilt inkpot, fretted, like a porcupine with pens, a fat, flat leather case for the transportation of documents and two notaries: one in black, fat, and bald-headed; one in blue uniform, with a shining monocle, and a brown moustache that he continued to twirl. . . .

Looking round that scene Sylvia's humour calmed her and she heard the general say:

'She's supposed to walk on my arm to that table and sign the settlement. . . . We're supposed to be the first to sign it together. . . . But she won't. Because of the price of coal. It appears that she has hothouses in miles. And she thinks the English have put up the price of coal as if . . . damn it you'd think we did it just to keep her hothouse stoves out.'

The duchess had delivered, apparently, a vindictive, cold, calm, and uninterruptible oration on the wickedness of her country's allies as people who should have allowed France to be devastated and the flower of her youth slain in order that they might put up the price of a comestible that was absolutely needed in her life. There was no arguing with her. There was no British soul there who both knew anything about economics and spoke French. And there she sat, apparently immovable. She did not refuse to sign the marriage contract. She just made no motion to go to it and, apparently, the resulting marriage would be illegal if that document were brought to her! . . .

The general said:

'Now, what the deuce will Christopher find to say to her? He'll find something because he could talk the hind legs off anything. But what the deuce will it be? . . .'

It almost broke Sylvia's heart to see how exactly Christopher did the right thing. He walked up that path to the sun and made in front of the duchess a little awkward nick with his head and shoulders that was rather more like a curtsy than a bow. It appeared that he knew the duchess quite well . . . as he knew everybody in the world quite well. He smiled at her and then became just suitably grave. Then he began to speak an admirable, very old-fashioned French with an atrocious English accent. Sylvia had no idea that he knew a word of the language—that she herself knew very well indeed. She said to herself that upon her word it was like hearing Chateaubriand talk—if Chateaubriand had been brought up in an English hunting country. . . . Of course Christopher *would* cultivate an English accent: to show that he was an English country gentleman. And he would speak correctly—to show that an English Tory can do anything in the world if he wants to. . . .

The British faces in the room looked blank: the French faces turned electrically upon him. Sylvia said:

'Who would have thought . . . ?' The duchess jumped to her feet and took Christopher's arm. She sailed with him imperiously past the general and past Sylvia. She was saying that that was just what she would have expected of a *milor Anglais* . . . *Avec un spleen tel que vous l'avez!*

Christopher, in short, had told the duchess that as his family owned almost the largest stretch of hot-house coal-burning land in England and her family the largest stretch of hothouses in the sister-country of France, what could they do better than make an alliance? He would instruct his brother's manager to see that the duchess was supplied for the duration of hostilities and as long after as she pleased with all the coal needed for her glass at the pit-head prices of the Middlesbrough-Cleveland district as the prices were on the 3rd of August, nineteen fourteen . . . He repeated: 'The pit-head price . . . *livrable au prix de l'houillemaigre dans l'enceinte des puits de ma campagne.*'

... Much to the satisfaction of the duchess, who knew all about prices.

... A triumph for Christopher was at that moment so exactly what Sylvia thought she did not want that she decided to tell the general that Christopher was a Socialist. That might well take him down a peg or two in the general's esteem... for the general's arm-patting admiration for Tietjens, the man who did not argue but acted over the price of coal, was as much as she could bear. ... But, thinking it over in the smoking-room after dinner, by which time she was a good deal more aware of what she did want, she was not so certain that she *had* done what she wanted. ... Indeed, even in the octagonal room during the economical festivities that followed the signatures, she had been far from certain that she had not done almost exactly what she did not want. ...

It had begun with the general's exclaiming to her:

'You know your man's the most unaccountable fellow. ... He wears the damn-shabbiest uniform of any officer I ever have to talk to. He's said to be unholily hard up. ... I even heard he had a cheque sent back to the club. ... Then he goes and makes a princely gift like that—just to get Levin out of ten minutes' awkwardness. ... I wish to goodness I could understand the fellow. ... He's got a positive genius for getting all sorts of things out of the most beastly muddles. ... Why, he's even been useful to me. ... And then he's got a positive genius for getting into the most disgusting messes. ... You're too young to have heard of Dreyfus. ... But I always say that Christopher is a regular Dreyfus. ... I shouldn't be astonished if he didn't end by being drummed out of the army ... which heaven forbid!'

It had been then that Sylvia had said:

'Hasn't it ever occurred to you that Christopher was a Socialist?'

For the first time in her life Sylvia saw her husband's godfather look grotesque. ... His jaw dropped down, his white hair became disarrayed, and he dropped his pretty

cap with all the gold oakleaves and the scarlet. When he rose from picking it up his thin old face was purple and distorted. She wished she hadn't said it: she wished she hadn't said it. He exclaimed:

'Christopher! . . . A So . . .' He gasped as if he could not pronounce the word. He said: 'Damn it all! . . . I've loved that boy. . . . He's my only godson. . . . His father was my best friend. . . . I've watched over him. . . . I'd have married his mother if she would have had me. . . . Damn it all, he's down in my will as residuary legatee after a few small things left to my sister and my collection of horns to the regiment I commanded. . . .'

Sylvia—they were sitting on the sofa the duchess had left—patted him on the forearm and said:

'But general . . . godfather. . . .'

'It explains everything,' he said with a mortification that was painful. His white moustache drooped and trembled. 'And what makes it all the worse—he's never had the courage to tell me his opinions.' He stopped, snorted and exclaimed: 'By God, I *will* have him drummed out of the service. . . . By God, I *will*. I can do that much. . . .'

His grief so shut him in on himself that she could say nothing to him. . . .

'You tell me he seduced the little Wannop girl. . . . The last person in the world he should have seduced. . . . Ain't there millions of other women? . . . He got you sold up, didn't he? . . . Along with keeping a girl in a tobacco-shop. . . . By jove, I almost lent him . . . offered to lend him money on that occasion. . . . You can forgive a young man for going wrong with women. . . . We all do. . . . We've all set up girls in tobacco-shops in our time. . . . But, damn it all, if the fellow's a Socialist it puts a different complexion. . . . I could forgive him even for the little Wannop girl, if he wasn't . . . But . . . Good God, isn't it just the thing that a dirty-minded Socialist would do? . . . To seduce the daughter of his father's oldest friend, next to me. . . . Or perhaps Wannop was an older friend than me. . . .'

He had calmed himself a little—and he was not such a

fool. He looked at her now with a certain keenness in his blue eyes that showed no sign of age. He said:

'See here, Sylvia. . . . You aren't on terms with Christopher for all the good game you put up here this afternoon. . . . I shall have to go into this. It's a serious charge to bring against one of His Majesty's officers. . . . Women do say things against their husbands when they are not on good terms with them. . . .' He went on to say that he did not say she wasn't justified. If Christopher had seduced the little Wannop girl it was enough to make her wish to harm him. Had always found her the soul of honour, straight as a die, straight as she rode to hounds. And if she wished to nag against her husband, even if in little things it wasn't quite the truth, she was perhaps within her rights as a woman. She had said, for instance, that Tietjens had taken two pairs of her best sheets. Well, his own sister, her friend, raised Cain if he took anything out of the house they lived in. She had made an atrocious row because he had taken his own shaving-glass out of his own bedroom at Mountsby. Women liked to have sets of things. Perhaps she, Sylvia, had sets of pairs of sheets. His sister had linen sheets with the date of the battle of Waterloo on them. . . . Naturally you would not want a set spoiled. . . . But this was another matter. He ended up very seriously:

'I have not got time to go into this now. . . . I ought not to be another minute away from my office. These are very serious days. . . .' He broke off to utter against the Prime Minister and the Cabinet at home a series of violent imprecations. He went on:

'But this will have to be gone into. . . . It's heart-breaking that my time should be taken up by matters like this in my own family. . . . But these fellows aim at sapping the heart of the army. . . . They say they distribute thousands of pamphlets recommending the rank and file to shoot their officers and go over to the Germans. . . . Do you seriously mean that Christopher belongs to an organization? What is it you are going on? What evidence have you? . . .'

She said:

'Only that he is heir to one of the biggest fortunes in England, for a commoner, and he refuses to touch a penny. . . . His brother Mark tells me Christopher could have . . . Oh, a fabulous sum a year. . . . But he has made over Groby to me. . . .'

The general nodded his head as if he were ticking off ideas.

'Of course, refusing property is a sign of being one of these fellows. By jove, I must go. . . . But as for his not going to live at Groby: if he is setting up house with Miss Wannop. . . . Well, he could not flaunt her in the face of the country. . . . And, of course, those sheets! . . . As you put it it looked as if he'd beggared himself with his dissipations. . . . But of course, if he is refusing money from Mark, it's another matter. . . . Mark would make up a couple of hundred dozen pairs of sheets without turning a hair. . . . Of course there are the extraordinary things Christopher says. . . . I've often heard you complain of the immoral way he looks at the serious affairs of life. . . . You said he once talked of lethal-chambering unfit children.'

He exclaimed:

'I must go. There's Thurston looking at me. . . . But what then is it that Christopher has said? . . . Hang it all: what *is* at the bottom of that fellow's mind? . . .'

'He desires,' Sylvia said, and she had no idea when she said it, 'to model himself upon our Lord. . . .'

The general leant back in the sofa. He said almost indulgently:

'Who's that . . . our *Lord*?'

Sylvia said:

'Upon our Lord Jesus Christ. . . .'

He sprang to his feet as if she had stabbed him with a hatpin.

'Our . . .' he exclaimed. 'Good God! . . . I always knew he had a screw loose. . . . But . . .' He said briskly: 'Give all his goods to the poor! . . . But He wasn't a . . . Not

a Socialist! What was it He said: Render unto Caesar. . . . It wouldn't be necessary to drum Him out of the Army. . . .' He said: 'Good Lord! . . . Good Lord! . . . Of course his poor dear mother was a little. . . . But, hang it! . . . The Wannop girl! . . . ' Extreme discomfort overcame him. . . . Tietjens was half-way across from the inner room, coming towards them.

He said:

'Major Thurston is looking for you, sir. Very urgently. . . .' The general regarded him as if he had been the unicorn of the royal arms, come alive. He exclaimed:

'Major Thurston! . . . Yes! Yes! . . . ' and, Tietjens saying to him:

'I wanted to ask you, sir. . . .' he pushed Tietjens away as if he dreaded an assault and went off with short, agitated steps.

So sitting there, in the smoking-lounge of the hotel which was cram-jam full of officers, and no doubt perfectly respectable, but over-giggling women—the sort of place and environment which she had certainly never expected to be called upon to sit in; and waiting for the return of Tietjens and the ex-sergeant-major—who again was certainly not the sort of person that she had ever expected to be asked to wait for, though for long years she had put up with Tietjens' protégé, the odious Sir Vincent Macmaster, at all sorts of meals and all sorts of places . . . but of course that was only Christopher's rights . . . to have in his own house, which, in the circumstances, wasn't morally hers, any snuffling, nervous, walrus-moustached or orientally obsequious protégé that he chose to patronize. . . . And she quite believed that Tietjens, when he had invited the sergeant-major to celebrate his commission with himself at dinner, hadn't expected to dine with her. . . . It was the sort of obtuseness of which he was disconcertingly capable, though at other times he was much more disconcertingly capable of reading your thoughts to the last hairsbreadth. . . . And, as a matter of fact, she objected much less to

dining with the absolute lower classes than with merely snuffly little official critics like Macmaster, and the sergeant-major had served her turn very well when it had come to flaying the hide off Christopher. . . . So, sitting there, she made a new pact, this time with Father Consett in heaven. . . .

Father Consett was very much in her mind, for she was very much in the midst of the British military authorities who had hanged him. . . . She had never seemed before to be so in the midst of these negligible, odious, unpresentable, horse-laughing schoolboys. It antagonized her, and it was a weight upon her, for hitherto she had completely ignored them: in this place they seemed to have a coherence, a mass . . . almost a life. . . . They rushed in and out of rooms occupied, as incomprehensibly, as unpresentably, with things like boots, washing, vaccination certificates. . . . Even with old tins! . . . A man with prematurely white hair and a pasty face, with a tunic that bulged both above and below his belt, would walk into the drawing-room of a lady who superintended all the acid-drop and cigarette stalls of that city and remark to a thin-haired, deaf man with an amazingly red nose—a nose that had a perfectly definite purple and scarlet diagonal demarcation running from the bridge to the upper side of the nostrils—that he had got his old tins off his hands at last. He would have to repeat it in a shout because the red-nosed man, his head hanging down, would have heard nothing at all. The deaf man would say Humph! Humph! Snuffle. The woman giving the tea—a Mrs Hemmerdine, of Tarbolton, whom you might have met at home, would be saying that at last she had got twelve reams of notepaper with forget-me-nots in the top corners when the deaf-faced man would begin, gruffly and uninterruptedly, a monologue on his urgent need for twenty thousand tons of sawdust for the new slow-burning stoves in the men's huts. . . .

It was undeniably like something moving. . . . All these things going in one direction. . . . A disagreeable force set in motion by gawky schoolboys—but schoolboys of the

Sixth Form, sinister, hobbledehoy, waiting in the corners of playgrounds to torture someone, weak and unfortunate. . . . In one or other corner of their world-wide playground they had come upon Father Consett and hanged him. No doubt they tortured him first. And, if he made an offering of his sufferings, then and there to Heaven, no doubt he was already in paradise. . . . Or, if he was not yet in heaven, certain of these souls in purgatory were yet listened to in the midst of their torments. . . .

So she said:

'Blessed and martyred father, I know that you loved Christopher and wish to save him from trouble. I will make this pact with you. Since I have been in this room I have kept my eyes in the boat—almost in my lap. I will agree to leave off torturing Christopher and I will go into retreat in a convent of Ursuline Dames Nobles—for I can't stand the nuns of that other convent—for the rest of my life. . . . And I know that will please you, too, for you were always anxious for the good of my soul. . . .' She was going to do that if when she raised her eyes and really looked round the room she saw in it one man that looked presentable. She did not ask that he should more than look presentable, for she wanted nothing to do with the creature. He was to be a sign: not a prey!

She explained to the dead priest that she could not go all the world over to see if it contained a presentable man, but she could not bear to be in a convent for ever, and have the thought that there wasn't, for other women, one presentable man in the world. . . . For Christopher would be no good to them. He would be mooning for ever over the Wannop girl. Or her memory. That was all one . . . He was content with LOVE. . . . If he knew that the Wannop girl was loving him in Bedford Park, and he in the Khyber States with the Himalayas between them, he would be quite content. . . . That would be correct in its way. but not very helpful for other women. . . . Besides, if he were the only presentable man in the world, half the women would be in love with

him. . . . And that would be disastrous, because he was no more responsive than a bullock in a fattening pen.

'So, father,' she said, 'work a miracle. . . . It's not very much of a little miracle. . . . Even if a presentable man doesn't exist you could put him there. . . . I'll give you ten minutes before I look. . . .'

She thought it was pretty sporting of her, for, she said to herself, she was perfectly in earnest. If in that long, dim, green-lamp-shaded, and of course be-palm-leaved, badly-proportioned, glazed, ignoble public room, there appeared one decentish man, as decentish men went before this beanfeast began, she would go into retreat for the rest of her life. . .

She fell into a sort of dim trance after she had looked at her watch. Often she went into these dim trances . . . ever since she had been a girl at school with Father Consett for her spiritual adviser! . . . She seemed to be aware of the father moving about the room, lifting up a book and putting it down. . . . Her ghostly friend! . . . Goodness, he was unpresentable enough, with his broad, open face that always looked dirtyish, his great dark eyes, and his great mouth. . . . But a saint and a martyr. . . . She felt him there. . . . What had they murdered him for? Hanged at the word of a half-mad, half-drunk subaltern, because he had heard the confession of some of the rebels the night before they were taken. . . . He was over in the far corner of the room. . . . She heard him say: they had not understood, the men that had hanged him. That is what you would say, father . . . Have mercy on them, for they know not what they do. . . .

Then have mercy on me, for half the time I don't know what I'm doing! . . . It was like a spell you put on me. At Lobscheid. Where my mother was, when I came back from that place without my clothes. . . . You said, didn't you, to mother, but she told me afterwards: The real hell for that poor boy, meaning Christopher, will come when he falls in love with some young girl—as, mark me, he will. . . . For she, meaning me, will tear the world down to get at him.

... And when mother said she was certain I would never do anything vulgar you obstinately did not agree. ... You knew me. ...

She tried to rouse herself and said: He *knew* me. ... Damn it he knew me! ... What's vulgarity to me, Sylvia Tietjens, born Satterthwaite? I do what I want and that's good enough for anyone. Except a priest. Vulgarity! I wonder mother could be so obtuse. If I am vulgar I'm vulgar with a purpose. Then it's not vulgarity. It may be vice. Or viciousness. ... But if you commit a mortal sin with your eyes open it's not vulgarity. ... You chance hell fire for ever. ... Good enough!

The weariness sank over her again and the sense of the father's presence. ... She was back again in Lobscheid, thirty-six hours free of Perowne with the father and her mother in the dim sitting-room, all antlers, candle-lit, with the father's shadow waving over the pitchpine walls and ceilings. ... It was a bewitched place, in the deep forest of Germany. The father himself said it was the last place in Europe to be Christianized. Or perhaps it was never Christianized. ... That was perhaps why those people, the Germans, coming from those deep, devil-infested woods, did all these wickednesses. Or maybe they were not wicked. ... One would never know properly. ... But maybe the father had put a spell on her. ... His words had never been out of her mind, much. ... At the back of her brain, as the saying was. ...

Some man drifted near her and said:

'How do you do, Mrs Tietjens? Who would have thought of seeing you here?'

She answered:

'I have to look after Christopher now and then.' He remained hanging over her with a schoolboy grin for a minute, then he drifted away as an object sinks into deep water. ... Father Consett again hovered near her. She exclaimed:

'But the real point is, father. ... Is it sporting? ... Sporting or whatever it is?' And Father Consett breathed:

'Ah! . . .' with his terrible power of arousing doubts. . . . She said:

'When I saw Christopher . . . Last night? . . . Yes, it *was* last night. . . . Turning back to go up that hill. . . . And I had been talking about him to a lot of grinning private soldiers. . . . To *madden* him. . . . You *mustn't* make scenes before the servants. . . . A heavy man, tired . . . come down the hill and lumbering up again. . . . There was a search-light turned on him just as he turned. . . . I remembered the white bulldog I thrashed on the night before it died. . . . A tired, silent beast . . . with a fat white behind. . . . Tired out. . . . You couldn't see its tail because it was turned down, the stump. . . . A great, silent beast. . . . The vet said it had been poisoned with red lead by burglars. . . . It's beastly to die of red lead. . . . It eats up the liver. . . . And you think you're getting better for a fortnight. And you're always cold . . . freezing in the blood-vessels. . . . And the poor beast had left its kennel to try and be let in to the fire. . . . And I found it at the door when I came in from a dance without Christopher. . . . And got the rhinoceros whip and lashed into it. . . . There's a pleasure in lashing into a naked white beast. . . . Obese and silent. . . . Like Christopher. . . . I thought Christopher might. . . . That night. . . . It went through my head. . . . It hung down its head. . . . A great head, room for a whole British encyclopaedia of mis-information, as Christopher used to put it. . . . It said: "What a hope!" . . . As I hope to be saved, though I never shall be, the dog said: "What a hope!" . . . Snow-white in quite black bushes. . . . And it went under a bush. . . . They found it dead there in the morning. . . . You can't imagine what it looked like, with its head over its shoulder, as it looked back and said: What a hope! to me. . . . Under a dark bush. An eu . . . eu . . . euonymus, isn't it? . . . In thirty degrees of frost with all the blood-vessels exposed on the naked surface of the skin. . . . It's the seventh circle of hell, isn't it? the frozen one. . . . The last stud-white bulldog of that breed. . . . As Christopher is the last stud-white hope of the Groby Tory

breed. . . . Modelling himself on our Lord. . . . But our Lord was never married. He never touched on topics of sex. Good for Him. . . .'

She said: 'The ten minutes is up, father . . .' and looked at the round, starred surface between the diamonds of her wrist watch. She said: 'Good God! . . . Only one minute. . . . I've thought all that in only one minute. . . . I understand how hell can be an eternity. . . .'

Christopher, very weary, and ex-Sergeant-Major Cowley, very talkative by now, loomed down between palms. Cowley was saying: 'It's infamous! . . . It's past bearing. . . . To re-order the draft at eleven. . . .' They sank into chairs. . . . Sylvia extended towards Tietjens a small packet of letters. She said: 'You had better look at these. . . . I had your letters sent to me from the flat as there was so much uncertainty about your movements. . . .' She found that she did not dare, under Father Consett's eyes, to look at Tietjens as she said that. She said to Cowley: 'We might be quiet for a minute or two while the captain reads his letters. . . . Have another liqueur? . . .'

She then observed that Tietjens just bent open the top of the letters from Mrs Wannop and then opened that from his brother Mark.

'Curse it,' she said, 'I've given him what he wants! . . . He knows. . . . He's seen the address . . . that they're still in Bedford Park. . . . He can think of the Wannop girl as there. . . . He has not been able to know, till now, where she is. . . . He'll be imagining himself in bed with her there. . . .'

Father Consett, his broad, unmodelled dark face full of intelligence and with the blissful unction of the saint and martyr, was leaning over Tietjens' shoulder. . . . He must be breathing down Christopher's back as, her mother said, he always did when she held a hand at auction and he could not play because it was between midnight and his celebrating the holy mass. . . .

She said:

'No, I am not going mad. . . . This is an effect of fatigue

on the optic nerves. . . . Christopher has explained that to me. . . . He says that when his eyes have been very tired with making one of his senior wrangler's calculations he has often seen a woman in an eighteenth-century dress looking into a drawer in his bureau. . . . Thank God, I've had Christopher to explain things to me. . . . I'll never let him go. . . . Never, never, let him go. . . .'

It was not, however, until several hours later that the significance of the father's apparition came to her and those intervening hours were extraordinarily occupied—with emotions, and even with action. To begin with, before he had read the fewest possible words of his brother's letter, Tietjens looked up over it and said:

'Of course you will occupy Groby. . . . With Michael. . . . Naturally the proper business arrangements will be made. . . .' He went on reading the letter, sunk in his chair under the green shade of a lamp. . . .

The letter, Sylvia knew, began with the words: 'Your — of a wife has been to see me with the idea of getting any allowance I might be minded to make you transferred to herself. Of course she can have Groby, for I shan't let it, and could not be bothered with it myself. On the other hand, you may want to live at Groby with that girl and chance the racket. I should if I were you. You would probably find the place worth the . . . what is it? ostracism, if there was any. . . . But I'm forgetting that the girl is not your mistress unless anything has happened since I saw you. . . . And you probably would want Michael to be brought up at Groby, in which case you couldn't keep the girl there, even if you camouflaged her as governess. At least I think that kind of arrangement always turns out badly: there's bound to be a stink, though Crosby of Ulick did it and nobody much minded. . . . But it was mucky for the Crosby children. Of course if you want your wife to have Groby she must have enough to run it with credit, and expenses are rising damnably. Still, our incomings rise not a little, too, which is not the case with some. The only thing I insist on is that you make plain to that baggage

that whatever I allow her, even if it's no end of a hot income, not one penny of it comes out of what I wish you would allow me to allow you. I mean I want you to make plain to that rouged piece—or perhaps it's really natural, my eyes are not what they were—that what you have is absolutely independent of what she sucks up as the mother of our father's heir and to keep our father's heir in the state of life that is his due. . . . I hope you feel satisfied that the boy is your son, for it's more than I should be, looking at the party. . . . But even if he is not he is our father's heir all right and must be so treated. . . .

'But be plain about that, for the trollop came to me, if you please, with the proposal that I should dock you of any income I might propose to allow you—and to which of course you are absolutely entitled under our father's will, though it is no good reminding you of that!—as a token from me that I disapproved of your behaviour when, damn it, there is not an action of yours that I would not be proud to have to my credit. At any rate in this affair, for I cannot help thinking that you could be of more service to the country if you were anywhere else but where you are. But you know what your conscience demands of you better than I, and I dare say these hell-cats have so mauled you that you are glad to be able to get away into any hole. But don't let yourself die in your hole. Groby will have to be looked after, and even if you do not live there you can keep a strong hand on Sanders, or whoever you elect to have as manager. That monstrosity you honour with your name—which is also mine, thank you!—suggested that if I consented to let her live at Groby she would have her mother to live with her, in which case her mother would be good to look after the estate. I dare say she would, though she has had to let her own place. But then almost everyone else has. She seems anyhow a notable woman, with her head screwed on the right way. I did not tell the discreditable daughter that she—her mother—had come to see me at breakfast immediately after seeing you off, she was so upset. And she *keawert ho down i' th' ingle and had a*

gradely pow. You remember how Gobbles the gardener used to say that. A good chap, though he came from Lancashire! . . . The mother has no illusions about the daughter and is heart and soul for you. She was dreadfully upset at your going, the more so as she believes that it's her offspring has driven you out of the country and that you purpose . . . isn't stopping one the phrase? Don't do that.

'I saw your girl yesterday. . . . She looked peaky. But of course I have seen her several times, and she always looks peaky. I do not understand why you do not write to them. The mother is clamorous because you have not answered several letters and have not sent her military information she wants for some article she is writing for a Swiss magazine. . . .'

Sylvia knew the letter almost by heart as far as that because in the unbearable white room of the convent near Birkenhead she had twice begun to copy it out, with the idea of keeping the copies for use in some sort of publicity. But, at that point, she had twice been overcome by the idea that it was not a very sporting thing to do, if you really think about it. Besides, the letter after that—she *had* glanced through it—occupied itself almost entirely with the affairs of Mrs Wannop. Mark, in his naïve way, was concerned that the old lady, although now enjoying the income from the legacy left her by their father, had not immediately settled down to write a deathless novel; although, as he added, he knew nothing about novels. . . .

Christopher was reading away at his letters beneath the green-shaded lamp; the ex-quartermaster had begun several sentences and dropped into demonstrative silence at the reminder that Tietjens was reading. Christopher's face was completely without expression; he might have been reading a return from the office of statistics in the old days at breakfast. She wondered, vaguely, if he would see fit to apologize for the epithets that his brother had applied to her. Probably he would not. He would consider that she having opened the letter must take the responsibility of the contents. Something like that. Thumps and rumbles

began to exist in the relative silence. Cowley said: 'They're coming again then!' Several couples passed them on the way out of the room. Amongst them there was certainly no presentable man; they were all either too old or too hobbledehoy, with disproportionate noses and vacant, half-opened mouths.

Accompanying Christopher's mind, as it were, whilst he read his letter had induced in her a rather different mood. The pictures in her own mind were rather of Mark's dingy breakfast-room in which she had had her interview with him—and of the outside of the dingy house in which the Wannops lived, at Bedford Park. . . . But she was still conscious of her pact with the father and, looking at her wrist watch, saw that by now six minutes had passed. . . . It was astonishing that Mark, who was a millionaire at least, and probably a good deal more, should live in such a dingy apartment—it had for its chief decoration the hoofs of several deceased race-winners, mounted as ink-stands, as pen-racks, as paper-weights—and afford himself only such a lugubrious breakfast of fat slabs of ham over which bled pallid eggs. . . . For she too, like her mother, had looked in on Mark at breakfast-time—her mother because she had just seen Christopher off to France, and she because, after a sleepless night—the third of a series—she had been walking about St. James's Park and, passing under Mark's windows, it had occurred to her that she might do Christopher some damage by putting his brother wise about the entanglement with Miss Wannop. So, on the spur of the moment, she had invented a desire to live at Groby with the accompanying necessity for additional means. For, although she was a pretty wealthy woman, she was not wealthy enough to live at Groby and keep it up. The immense old place was not so immense because of its room-space, though, as far as she could remember, there must be anything between forty and sixty rooms, but because of the vast old grounds, the warren of stabling, wells, rose-walks and fencing. . . . A man's place, really, the furniture very grim and the corridors on the ground floor all slabbed

with great stones. So she had looked in on Mark, reading his correspondence with his copy of *The Times* airing on a chair-back before the fire—for he was just the man to retain the eighteen-forty idea that you catch cold by reading a damp newspaper. His grim, tight, brown-wooden features that might have been carved out of an old chair, had expressed no emotion at all during the interview. He had offered to have up some more ham and eggs for her and had asked one or two questions as to how she meant to live at Groby if she went there. Otherwise he had said nothing about the information she had given him as to the Wannop girl having had a baby by Christopher—for purposes of conversation she had adhered to that old story, at any rate till that interview. He had said nothing at all. Not one word. . . . At the end of the interview, when he had risen and produced from an adjoining room a bowler hat and an umbrella, saying that he must now go to his office, he had put to her without any expression pretty well what stood in the letter, as far as business was concerned. He said that she could have Groby, but she must understand that, his father being now dead and he a public official, without children and occupied in London with work that suited him, Groby was practically Christopher's property to do what he liked with as long as—which he certainly would—he kept it in proper style. So that, if she wished to live there, she must produce Christopher's authorization to that effect. And he added, with an equableness so masking the proposition that it was not until she was well out of the house and down the street that its true amazingness took her breath away:

'Of course, Christopher, if what you say is true, might want to live at Groby with Miss Wannop. In that case he would have to.' And he had offered her an expressionless hand and shepherded her, rather fussily, through his dingy and awkward front passages that were lit only from ground-glass windows giving apparently on to his bathroom. . . .

It wasn't until that moment, really, that, at once with exhilaration and also with a sinking at the heart, she

realized what she was up against in the way of a combination. For, when she had gone to Mark's, she had been more than half-maddened by the news that Christopher at Rouen was in hospital and, although the hospital authorities had assured her, at first by telegram and then by letter, that it was nothing more than his chest, she had not had any knowledge of to what extent Red Cross authorities did or did not mislead the relatives of casualties.

So it had seemed natural that she should want to inflict on him all the injuries that she could at the moment, the thought that he was probably in pain making her wish to add all she could to that pain. . . . Otherwise, of course, she would not have gone to Mark's. . . . For it was a mistake in strategy. But then she said to herself: 'Confound it! . . . What strategy was it a mistake in? What do I care about strategy? What am I out for? . . .' She did what she wanted to, on the spur of the moment! . . .

Now she certainly realized. How Christopher had got round Mark she did not know or much care, but there Christopher certainly was, although his father had certainly died of a broken heart at the rumours that were going round about his son—rumours she, almost as efficiently as the man called Ruggles and more irresponsible gossips, had set going about Christopher. They had been meant to smash Christopher: they had smashed his father instead. . . . But Christopher had got round Mark, whom he had not seen for ten years. . . . Well, he probably would. Christopher was perfectly immaculate, that was a fact, and Mark, though he appeared half-witted in a North Country way, was no fool. He could not be a fool. He was a really august public official. And, although as a rule Sylvia gave nothing at all for any public official, if a man like Mark had the position by birth amongst presentable men that he certainly ought to have and was also the head of a department and reputed absolutely indispensable—you could not ignore him. . . . He said, indeed, in the later, more gossipy parts of his letter that he had been offered a baronetcy, but he

wanted Christopher to agree with his refusing it. Christopher would not want the beastly title after his death, and for himself he would be rather struck with the pip than let that harlot—meaning herself—become Lady T. by any means of his. He had added, with his queer solicitude, ‘Of course if you thought of divorcing—which I wish to God you would, though I agree that you are right not to—and the title would go to the girl after my decease I’d take it gladly, for a title is a bit of a help after a divorce. But as it is I propose to refuse it and ask for a knighthood, if it won’t too sicken you to have me a Sir. . . . For I hold no man ought to refuse an honour in times like these, as has been done by certain sickening intellectuals, because it is like slapping the sovereign in the face and bound to hearten the other side, which no doubt was what was meant by those fellows.’

There was no doubt that Mark—with the possible addition of the Wannops—made a very strong backing for Christopher if she decided to make a public scandal about him. . . . As for the Wannops . . . the girl was negligible. Or possibly not, if she turned nasty and twisted Christopher round her fingers. But the old mother was a formidable figure—with a bad tongue, and viewed with a certain respect in places where people talked . . . both on account of her late husband’s position and of the solid sort of articles she wrote. . . . She, Sylvia, had gone to take a look at the place where these people lived . . . a dreary street in an outer suburb, the houses—she knew enough about estates to know—what is called tile-healed, the upper parts of tile, the lower flimsy brick and the tiles in bad condition. Oldish houses really, in spite of their sham artistic aspect, and very much shadowed by old trees that must have been left to add to the picturesqueness. . . . The rooms poky, and they must be very dark. . . . The residence of extreme indigence, or of absolute poverty. . . . She understood that the old lady’s income had so fallen off during the war that they had nothing to live on but what the girl made as a schoolteacher, or a teacher of athletics in a girls’ school. . . .

She had walked two or three times up and down the street with the idea that the girl might come out: then it had struck her that that was rather an ignoble proceeding, really. . . . It was, for the matter of that, ignoble that she should have a rival who starved in an ashbin. . . . But that was what men were like: she might think herself lucky that the girl did not inhabit a sweetshop. . . . And the man, Macmaster, said that the girl had a good head and talked well, though the woman Macmaster said that she was a shallow ignoramus. . . . That last was probably not true; at any rate the girl had been the Macmaster woman's most intimate friend for many years—as long as they were sponging on Christopher and until, lower middle-class snobs as they were, they began to think that they could get into Society by carneying to herself. . . . Still, the girl probably was a good talker and, if little, yet physically uncommonly fit. . . . A good homespun article. . . . She wished her no ill!

What was incredible was that Christopher should let her go on starving in such a poverty-stricken place when he had something like the wealth of the Indies at his disposal. . . . But the Tietjens were hard people! You could see that in Mark's rooms . . . and Christopher would lie on the floor as lief as in a goose-feather bed. And probably the girl would not take his money. She was quite right. That was the way to keep him. . . . She herself had no want of comprehension of the stimulation to be got out of parsimonious living. . . . In retreat at her convent she lay as hard and as cold as any anchorite, and rose to the nuns' matins at four.

It was not, in fact, their fittings or food that she objected to—it was that the lay-sisters, and some of the nuns, were altogether too much of the lower classes for her to like to have always about her. . . . That was why it was to the Dames Nobles that she would go, if she had to go into retreat for the rest of her life, according to contract. . . .

A gun manned by exhilarated anti-aircraft fellows, and so close that it must have been in the hotel garden, shook her physically at almost the same moment as an immense maroon popped off on the quay at the bottom of the street

in which the hotel was. She was filled with annoyance at these schoolboy exercises. A tall, purple-faced, white-moustached general of the more odious type, appeared in the doorway and said that all the lights but two must be extinguished and, if they took his advice, they would go somewhere else. There were good cellars in the hotel. He loafed about the room extinguishing the lights, couples and groups passing him on the way to the door. . . . Tietjens looked up from his letter—he was now reading one of Mrs Wannop's—but seeing that Sylvia made no motion he remained sunk in his chair. . . .

The old general said:

'Don't get up, Tietjens. . . . Sit down, lieutenant. . . . Mrs Tietjens, I presume. . . . But of course I know you are Mrs Tietjens. . . . There's a portrait of you in this week's . . . I forget the name. . . .' He sat down on the arm of a great leather chair and told her of all the trouble her escapade to that city had caused him. . . . He had been awakened immediately after a good lunch by some young officer on his staff who was scared to death by her having arrived without papers. His digestion had been deranged ever since. . . . Sylvia said she was very sorry. He should drink hot water and no alcohol with lunch. She had had very important business to discuss with Tietjens, and she had really not understood that they wanted papers of grown-up people. The general began to expatiate on the importance of his office and the number of enemy agents his perspicacity caused to be arrested every day in that city and the lines of communication. . . .

Sylvia was overwhelmed at the ingenuity of Father Consett. She looked at her watch. The ten minutes were up, but there did not appear to be a soul in the dim place. . . . The father had—and no doubt as a Sign that there could be no mistaking!—completely emptied that room. It was like his humour!

To make certain, she stood up. At the far end of the room, in the dimness of the one other reading lamp that the general had not extinguished, two figures were rather indis-

tinguishable. She walked towards them, the general at her side extending civilities all over her. He said that she need not be under any apprehension there. He adopted that device of clearing the room in order to get rid of the beastly young subalterns who would use the place to spoon in when the lights were turned down. She said she was only going to get a timetable from the far end of the room. . . .

The stab of hope that she had that one of the two figures would turn out to be the presentable man died. . . . They were a young mournful subaltern, with an incipient moustache and practically tears in his eyes, and an elderly, violently indignant baldheaded man in evening civilian clothes that must have been made by a country tailor. He was smacking his hands together to emphasize what, with great agitation, he was saying.

The general said that it was one of the young cubs on his own staff getting a dressing down from his dad for spending too much money. The young devils would get amongst the girls—and the old ones too. There was no stopping it. The place was a hotbed of . . . He left the sentence unfinished. She would not believe the trouble it gave him. . . . That hotel itself. . . . The scandals. . . .

He said she would excuse him if he took a little nap in one of the arm-chairs too far away to interfere with their business talk. He would have to be up half the night. He seemed to Sylvia a blazingly contemptible personage—too contemptible really for Father Consett to employ as an agent, in clearing the room. . . . But the omen was given. She had to consider her position. It meant—or did it?—that she had to be at war with the heavenly powers! . . . She clenched her hands. . . .

In passing by Tietjens in his chair the general boomed out the words:

‘I got your chit of this morning, Tietjens. . . . I must say. . . .’

Tietjens lumbered out of his chair and stood at attention, his leg-of-mutton hands stiffly on the seams of his breeches.

'It's pretty strong,' the general said, 'marking a charge-sheet sent down from *my* department: *Case explained*. We don't lay charges without due thought. And Lance-Corporal Berry is a particularly reliable N.C.O. I have difficulty enough to get them. Particularly after the late riots. It takes courage, I can tell you.'

'If,' Tietjens said, 'you would see fit, sir, to instruct the G.M.P. not to call Colonial troops damned conscripts, the trouble would be over. . . . We're instructed to use special discretion, as officers, in dealing with troops from the Dominions. They are said to be very susceptible of insult. . . .'

The general suddenly became a boiling pot from which fragments of sentences came away: *damned* insolence; court of inquiry; damned conscripts they were too. He calmed enough to say:

'They *are* conscripts, your men, aren't they? They give me more trouble . . . I should have thought that you would have wanted . . .'

Tietjens said:

'No, sir. I have not a man in my unit, as far as it's Canadian or British Columbian, that is not voluntarily enlisted. . . .'

The general exploded to the effect that he was bringing the whole matter before the G.O.C.I.C.'s department. Campion could deal with it how he wished: it was beyond himself. He began to bluster away from them; stopped; directed a frigid bow to Sylvia who was not looking at him; shrugged his shoulders and stormed off.

It was difficult for Sylvia to get hold again of her thoughts in the smoking-room, for the evening was entirely pervaded with military effects that seemed to her the pranks of schoolboys. Indeed, after Cowley, who had by now quite a good skinful of liquor, had said to Tietjens:

'By Jove, I would not like to be you and a little bit on if old Blazes caught sight of you to-night,' she said to Tietjens with real wonder:

'You don't mean to say that a gaga old fool like that could have any possible influence over you . . . *You!*'

Tietjens said:

'Well, it's a troublesome business, all this. . . .'

She said that it so appeared to be, for before he could finish his sentence an orderly was at his elbow extending, along with a pencil, a number of dilapidated papers. Tietjens looked rapidly through them, signing one after the other and saying intermittently:

'It's a trying time.' 'We're massing troops up the line as fast as we can go.' 'And with an endlessly changing personnel. . . .' He gave a snort of exasperation and said to Cowley: 'That horrible little Pitkins has got a job as bombing instructor. He can't march the draft. . . . Who the deuce am I to detail? Who the deuce is there? . . . You know all the little. . . .' He stopped because the orderly could hear. A smart boy. Almost the only smart boy left him.

Cowley barged out of his seat and said he would telephone the mess to see who was there. . . . Tietjens said to the boy:

'Sergeant-Major Morgan made out these returns of religions in the draft?'

The boy answered: 'No, sir, I did. They're all right.' He pulled a slip of paper out of his tunic pocket and said shyly:

'If you would not mind signing this, sir . . . I can get a lift on an A.S.C. trolley that's going to Boulogne to-morrow at six. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'No, you can't have leave. I can't spare you. What's it for?'

The boy said almost inaudibly that he wanted to get married.

Tietjens, still signing, said: 'Don't. . . . Ask your married pals what it's like!'

The boy, scarlet in his khaki, rubbed the sole of one foot on the instep of the other. He said that saving madam's

presence it was urgent. It was expected any day now. She was a real good gel. Tietjens signed the boy's slip and handed it to him without looking up. The boy stood with his eyes on the ground. A diversion came from the telephone, which was at the far end of the room. Cowley had not been able to get on to the camp because an urgent message with regard to German espionage was coming through to the sleeping general.

Cowley began to shout: 'For goodness' sake hold the line. . . . For goodness' sake hold the line. . . . I'm not the general. . . . I'm *not* the general. . . .' Tietjens told the orderly to awaken the sleeping warrior. A violent scene at the mouth of the quiescent instrument took place. The general roared to know who was the officer speaking. . . . Captain Bubblejocks. . . . Captain Cuddlestocks. . . . what in hell's name! And who was he speaking for? . . . Who? Himself? . . . Urgent was it? . . . Didn't he know the proper procedure was by writing? . . . Urgent damnation! . . . Did he not know where he was? . . . In the First Army by the Cassell Canal. . . . Well then . . . But the spy was in L. of C. territory, across the canal. . . . The French civilian authorities were very concerned. . . . They were, damn them! . . . And damn the officer. And damn the French *maire*. And damn the horse the supposed spy rode upon. . . . And when the officer was damned let him write to First Army Headquarters about it and attach the horse and the bandoliers as an exhibit. . . .

There was a great deal more of it. Tietjens, reading his papers still, intermittently explained the story as it came in fragments over the telephone in the general's repetitions. . . . Apparently the French civilian authorities of a place called Warendonck had been alarmed by a solitary horseman in English uniform who had been wandering desultorily about their neighbourhood for several days, seeming to want to cross the canal bridges, but finding them guarded. . . . There was an immense artillery dump in the neighbourhood, said to be the largest in the world, and the Germans dropped bombs as thick as peas all over those

parts in the hopes of hitting it. . . . Apparently the officer speaking was in charge of the canal bridgehead guards; but, as he was in First Army country, it was obviously an act of the utmost impropriety to awaken a general in charge of the spy-catching apparatus on the other side of the canal. . . . The general, returning past them to an arm-chair farther from the telephone, emphasized this point of view with great vigour.

The orderly had returned; Cowley went once more to the telephone, having consumed another liqueur brandy. Tietjens finished his papers and went through them rapidly again. He said to the boy: 'Got anything saved up?' The boy said: 'A fiver and a few bob.' Tietjens said: 'How many bob?' The boy: 'Seven, sir.' Tietjens, fumbling clumsily in an inner pocket and a little pocket beneath his belt, held out one leg-of-mutton fist and said: 'There! That will double it. Ten pounds fourteen! But it's very improvident of you. See that you save up a deuced lot more against the next one. Accouchements are confoundedly expensive things, as you'll learn, and ring money doesn't stretch for ever! . . .' He called out to the retreating boy: 'Here, orderly, come back. . . .' He added: 'Don't let it get all over camp. . . . I can't afford to subsidize all the seven-months children in the battalion. . . . I'll recommend you for paid lance-corporal when you return from leave if you go on as well as you have done.' He called the boy back again to ask him why Captain McKechnie had not signed the papers. The boy stuttered and stammered that Captain McKechnie was . . . He was . . .

Tietjens muttered: 'Good God!' beneath his breath. He said:

'The captain has had another nervous breakdown. . . .' The orderly accepted the phrase with gratitude. That was it. A nervous breakdown. They say he had been very queer at mess. About divorce. Or the captain's uncle. A barrow-night! Tietjens said: 'Yes, yes.' He half rose in his chair and looked at Sylvia. She exclaimed painfully:

'You can't go. I insist that you can't go.' He sank down

again and muttered wearily that it was very worrying. He had been put in charge of this officer by General Campion. He ought not to have left the camp at all perhaps. But McKechnie had seemed better. A great deal of the calmness of her insolence had left her. She had expected to have the whole night in which luxuriously to torment the lump opposite her. To torment and to allure him. She said:

‘You have settlements to come to now and here that will affect your whole life. Our whole lives! You propose to abandon them because a miserable little nephew of your miserable little friend. . . .’ She added in French: ‘Even as it is you cannot pay attention to these serious matters, because of these childish pre-occupations of yours. That is to be intolerably insulting to me!’ She was breathless.

Tietjens asked the orderly where Captain McKechnie was now. The orderly said he had left the camp. The colonel of the depot had sent a couple of officers as a search-party. Tietjens told the orderly to go and find a taxi. He could have a ride himself up to camp. The orderly said taxis would not be running on account of the air-raid. Could he order the G.M.P. to requisition one on urgent military service? The exhilarated air-gun pooped off there-upon three times from the garden. For the next hour it sent off every two or three minutes. Tietjens said: ‘Yes! Yes!’ to the orderly. The noises of the air raid became more formidable. A blue express letter of French civilian make was handed to Tietjens. It was from the duchess to inform him that coal for the use of greenhouses was forbidden by the French Government. She did not need to say that she relied on his honour to ensure her receiving her coal through the British military authorities, and she asked for an immediate reply. Tietjens expressed real annoyance while he read this. Distracted by the noise, Sylvia cried out that the letter must be from Valentine Wannop in Rouen. Did not the girl intend to let him have an hour in which to settle the whole business of his life? Tietjens moved to the chair next to hers. He handed her the duchess’s letter.

He began a long, slow, serious explanation with a long,

slow, serious apology. He said he regretted very much that when she should have taken the trouble to come so far in order to do him the honour to consult him about a matter which she would have been perfectly at liberty to settle for herself, the extremely serious military position should render him so liable to interruption. As far as he was concerned Groby was entirely at her disposal with all that it contained. And of course a sufficient income for the upkeep.

She exclaimed in an access of sudden and complete despair:

‘That means that you do not intend to live there.’ He said that that must settle itself later. The war would no doubt last a good deal longer. While it lasted there could be no question of his coming back. She said that that meant that he intended to get killed. She warned him that, if he got killed, she would cut down the great cedar at the south-west corner of Groby. It kept all the light out of the principal drawing-room and the bedrooms above it. . . . He winced: he certainly winced at that. She regretted that she had said it. It was along other lines that she desired to make him wince.

He said that, apart from his having no intention of getting himself killed, the matter was absolutely out of his hands. He had to go where he was ordered to go and do what he was told to do.

She exclaimed:

‘You! *You!* Isn’t it ignoble. That you should be at the beck and call of these ignoramuses. You!’

He went on explaining seriously that he was in no great danger—in no danger at all unless he was sent back to his battalion. And he was not likely to be sent back to his battalion unless he disgraced himself or showed himself negligent where he was. That was unlikely. Besides his category was so low that he was not eligible for his battalion, which, of course, was in the line. She ought to understand that everyone that she saw employed there was physically unfit for the line. She said:

'That's why they're such an awful lot. . . . It is not to this place that one should come to look for a presentable man. . . . Diogenes with his lantern was nothing to it.'

He said:

'There's that way of looking at it. . . . It is quite true that most of . . . let's say *your* friends . . . were killed off during the early days, or if they're still going they're in more active employments.' What she called presentableness was very largely a matter of physical fitness. . . . The horse, for instance, that he rode was rather a crock. . . . But though it was German and not thoroughbred it contrived to be up to his weight. . . . Her friends, more or less, of before the war were professional soldiers or of the type. Well, they were gone: dead or snowed under. But on the other hand, this vast town full of crocks did keep the thing going, if it could be made to go. It was not they that hindered the show: if it was hindered, that was done by her much less presentable friends, the ministry who, if they were professionals at all, were professional boodlers.

She exclaimed with bitterness:

'Then why didn't you stay at home to check them, if they *are* boodlers?' She added that the only people at home who kept social matters going at all with any life were precisely the more successful political professionals. When you were with them you would not know there was any war. And wasn't that what was wanted? Was the *whole* of life to be given up to ignoble horseplay? . . . She spoke with increased rancour because of the increasing thump and rumble of the air-raid. . . . Of course the politicians were ignoble beings that, before the war, you would not have thought of having in your house. . . . But whose fault was that, if not that of the better classes, who had gone away leaving England a dreary wilderness of fellows without consciences or traditions or manners? And she added some details of the habits at a country house of a member of the Government whom she disliked. 'And,' she finished up, 'it's your fault. Why aren't *you* Lord Chancellor, or Chancellor of the Exchequer, instead of whoever is, for I am

sure I don't know? You could have been, with your abilities and your interests. Then things would have been efficiently and honestly conducted. If your brother Mark, with not a tithe of your abilities, can be a permanent head of a department, what could you not have risen to with your gifts, and your influence . . . and your integrity?' And she ended up: 'Oh, Christopher!' on almost a sob.

Ex-Sergeant-Major Cowley, who had come back from the telephone, and during an interval in the thunderings, had heard some of Sylvia's light cast on the habits of members of the home Government, so that his jaw had really hung down, now, in another interval, exclaimed:

'Hear, hear! Madam! . . . There is nothing the captain might not have risen to. . . . He is doing the work of a brigadier now on the pay of an acting captain. . . . And the treatment he gets is scandalous. . . . Well, the treatment we all get is scandalous, tricked and defrauded as we are all at every turn. . . . And look at this new start with the draft . . . ' They had ordered the draft to be ready and countermanded it, and ordered it to be ready and countermanded it, until no one knew whether he stood on is 'ed or is 'eels. . . . It was to have gone off last night: when they'd 'ad it marched down to the station they 'ad it marched back and told them all it would not be wanted for six weeks. . . . Now it was to be got ready to go before daylight to-morrow morning in motor-lorries to the rail Ondekoeter way, the rail here 'aving been sabotaged! . . . Before daylight so that the enemy aeroplanes should not see it on the road. . . . Wasn't that a thing to break the 'arts of men *and* horderly rooms? It was outrageous. Did they suppose the 'Uns did things like that?

He broke off to say with husky enthusiasm of affection to Tietjens: 'Look 'ere, old . . . I mean, sir . . . There's *no* way of getting hold of an officer to march the draft. Them as are eligible gets to 'ear of what drafts is going and they've all bolted into their burries. Not a man of 'em will be back in camp before five to-morrow morning. Not when they 'ears there's a draft to go at four of mornings like

this. . . . Now . . . ' His voice became husky with emotion as he offered to take the draft himself to oblige Captain Tietjens. And the captain knew he could get a draft off pretty near as good as himself: or very near. As for the draft-conducting major he lived in that hotel and he, Cowley, 'ad seen 'im. No four in the morning for 'im. He was going to motor to Ondekoeter Station about seven. So there was no sense in getting the draft off before five, and it was still dark then: too dark for the 'Un planes to see what was moving. He'd be glad if the captain would be up at the camp by five to take a final look and to sign any papers that only the commanding officer could sign. But he knew the captain had had no sleep the night before because of his, Cowley's, infirmity, mostly, so he couldn't do less than give up a day and a half of his leave to taking the draft. Besides, he was going home for the duration and he would not mind getting a look at the old places they'd seen in 'fourteen, for the last time as a Cook's tourist. . . .

Tietjens, who was looking noticeably white, said:

'Do you remember O Nine Morgan at Noircourt?'

Cowley said:

'No. . . . Was 'e there? In your company, I suppose? . . . The man you mean that was killed yesterday. Died in your arms owing to my oversight. I ought to have been there.' He said to Sylvia with the gloating idea N.C.O.'s had that wives liked to hear of their husband's near escapes: 'Killed within a foot of the captain, 'e was. An 'orrible shock it must 'ave been for the captain.' A horrible mess. . . . The captain held him in his arms while he died. . . . As if he'd been a baby. Wonderful tender, the captain was! Well, you're apt to be when it's one of your own men. . . . No rank then! 'Do you know the only time the King must salute a private soldier and the private takes no notice? . . . When 'e's dead. . . .'

Both Sylvia and Tietjens were silent—and silvery white in the greenish light from the lamp. Tietjens indeed had shut his eyes. The old N.C.O. went on rejoicing to have the

floor to himself. He had got on his feet preparatory to going up to camp, and he swayed a little. . . .

'No,' he said and he waved his cigar gloriously. 'I don't remember O Nine Morgan at Noircourt. . . . But I remember. . . .'

Tietjens, with his eyes still shut, said:

'I only thought he might have been a man. . . .'

'No,' the old fellow went on imperiously, 'I don't remember 'im. . . . But, Lord, I remember what happened to *you!*' He looked down gloriously upon Sylvia: 'The captain caught 'is foot in. . . . You'd never believe what 'e caught 'is foot in! Never! . . . A pretty quiet affair it was, with a bit of moonlight. . . . Nothing much in the way of artillery. . . . Perhaps we surprised the 'Uns proper, perhaps they were wanting to give up their front-line trenches for a purpose. . . . There was next to no one in 'em. . . . I know it made me nervous. . . . My heart was fair in my boots, because there was so little doing! . . . It was when there was little doing that the 'Uns could be expected to do their worst. . . . Of course there was some machine-gunning. . . . There was one in particular away to the right of us. . . . And the moon, it was shining in the early morning. Wonderful peaceful. And a little mist. . . . And frozen hard. . . . Hard as you wouldn't believe. . . . Enough to make the shells dangerous.'

Sylvia said:

'It's not always mud, then?' and Tietjens, to her: 'He'll stop if you don't like it.' She said monotonously: 'No . . . I want to hear.'

Cowley drew himself up for his considerable effect:

'Mud!' he said. 'Not then. . . . Not by half. . . . I tell you, ma'am, we trod on the frozen faces of dead Germans as we doubled. . . . A terrible lot of Germans we'd killed a day or so before. . . . That was no doubt the reason they give up the trenches so easy: difficult to attack from, they was. . . . Anyhow, they left the dead for us to bury, knowing probably they were going, with a better 'eart! . . . But it fair put the wind up me anyhow to think of what their

counter-attack was going to be.... The counter-attack is always ten times as bad as the preliminary resistance. They 'as you with the rear of their trenches—the parados, we call it—as your front to boot. So I was precious glad when the moppers-up and supports come and went through us.... Laughing, they was.... Wiltshires.... My missus comes from that country.... Mrs Cowley, I mean.... So I'd seen the captain go down earlier on and I'd said: "There's another of the best stopped one...." He dropped his voice a little: he was one of the noted yarners of the regiment: 'Caught 'is foot, 'e 'ad, between two 'ands.... Sticking up out of the frozen ground.... As it might be in prayer.... Like this!' He elevated his two hands, the cigar between the fingers, the wrists close together and the fingers slightly curled inwards: 'Sticking up in the moonlight.... Poor devil!'

Tietjens said:

'I thought perhaps it was O Nine Morgan I saw that night.... Naturally I looked dead.... I hadn't a breath in my body.... And I saw a Tommy put his rifle to his pal's upper arm and fire.... As I lay on the ground....'

Cowley said:

'Ah, you saw that.... I heard the men talking of it.... But they naturally did not say who and where!'

Tietjens said with a negligence that did not ring true:

'The wounded man's name was Stilicho.... A queer name.... I suppose it's Cornish.... It was B Company in front of us.'

'You didn't bring 'em to a court martial?' Cowley asked. Tietjens said: No. He could not be quite certain. Though he *was* certain. But he had been worrying about a private matter. He had been worrying about it while he lay on the ground and that rather obscured his sense of what he saw. Besides, he said faintly, an officer must use his judgement. He had judged it better in this case not to have seen the.... His voice had nearly faded away: it was clear to Sylvia that he was coming to a climax of some mental torture. Suddenly he exclaimed to Cowley:

'Supposing I let him off one life to get him killed two years after. My God! That would be too beastly!'

Cowley snuffled in Tietjens' ear something that Sylvia did not catch—consolatory and affectionate. That intimacy was more than she could bear. She adopted her most negligent tone to ask:

'I suppose the one man had been trifling with the other's girl. Or wife!'

Cowley exploded: 'God bless you, no! They'd agreed upon it between them. To get one of them sent 'ome and the other, at any rate, out of *that* 'ell, leading him back to the dressing-station.' She said:

'You mean to say that a man would do *that*, to get out of it? ...'

Cowley said:

'God bless you, ma'am, with the 'ell the Tommies 'as of it. ... For it's in the line that the differences between the Other Ranks' life and the officers' comes in. ... I tell you, ma'am, old soldier as I am, and I've been in seven wars one with another ... there were times in this war when I could have shrieked, holding my right hand down. ...'

He paused and said: 'It was my idea. ... And it's been a good many others', that if I 'eld my 'and up over the parapet with perhaps my hat on it, in two minutes there would be a German sharpshooter's bullet through it. And then me for Blighty, as the soldiers say. ... And if that could happen to me, a regimental sergeant-major, with twenty-three years in the service. ...'

The bright orderly came in, said he had found a taxi, and melted into the dimness.

'A man,' the sergeant-major said, 'would take the risk of being shot for wounding his pal. ... They get to love their pals, passing the love of women. ...' Sylvia exclaimed: 'Oh!' as if at a pang of toothache. 'They do, ma'am,' he said, 'it's downright touching. ...'

He was by now very unsteady as he stood, but his voice was quite clear. That was the way it took him. He said to Tietjens:

'It's queer, what you say about home worries taking up your mind. . . . I remember in the Afghan campaign, when we were in the devil of a hot corner, I got a letter from my wife, Mrs Cowley, to say that our Winnie had the measles. . . . And there was only one difference between me and Mrs Cowley: I said that a child must have flannel next its skin, and she said flannelette was good enough. Wiltshire doesn't hold by wool as Lincolnshire does. Long fleeces the Lincolnshire sheep have. . . . And dodging the Afghan bullets all day among the boulders as we was, all I could think of. . . . For you know, ma'am, being a mother yourself, that the great thing with measles is to keep a child warm. . . . I kep' saying to myself—'arf crying I was—"If she only keeps wool next Winnie's skin! If she only keeps wool next Winnie's skin!" . . . But you know that, being a mother yourself. I've seen your son's photo on the captain's dressing-table. Michael, 'is name is. . . . So you see, the captain doesn't forget you and 'im.'

Sylvia said in a clear voice:

'Perhaps you would not go on!'

Distracted as she was by the anti-air-gun in the garden, though it was on the other side of the hotel and permitted you to get in a sentence or two before splitting your head with a couple of irregular explosions, she was still more distracted by a sudden vision—a remembrance of Christopher's face when their boy had had a temperature of 105° with the measles, up at his sister's house in Yorkshire. He had taken the responsibility, which the village doctor would not face, of himself placing the child in a bath full of split ice. . . . She saw him bending, expressionless in the strong lamp-light, with the child in his clumsy arms over the glittering, rubbled surface of the bath. . . . He was just as expressionless then as now. . . . He reminded her now of how he had been then: some strain in the lines of the face perhaps that she could not analyse. . . . Rather as if he had a cold in the head—a little suffocating, with suppressing his emotions, of course: his eyes looking at nothing. You would not have said that he even saw the

child—heir to Groby and all that! . . . Something had said to her, just in between two crashes of the gun: 'It's his own child. He went as you might say down to hell to bring it back to life. . . .' She knew it was Father Conssett saying that. She knew it was true: Christopher had been down to hell to bring the child back. . . . Fancy facing its pain in that dreadful bath! . . . The thermometer had dropped, running down under their eyes. . . . Christopher had said: 'A good heart, he's got! A good plucked one!' and then held his breath, watching the thin filament of bright mercury drop to normal. . . . She said now, between her teeth: 'The child is his property as much as the damned estate. . . . Well, I've got them both. . . .'

But it wasn't at this juncture that she wanted him tortured over that. So, when the second gun had done its crash, she had said to the bibulous old man:

'I wish you would not go on!' And Christopher had been prompt to the rescue of the *convenances* with:

'Mrs Tietjens does not see eye to eye with us in some matters!'

She said to herself: 'Eye to eye! My God! . . .' The whole of this affair, the more she saw of it, overwhelmed her with a sense of hatred. . . . And of depression! . . . She saw Christopher buried in this welter of fools, playing a schoolboy's game of make-believe. But of a make-believe that was infinitely formidable and infinitely sinister. . . . The crashing of the gun and of all the instruments for making noise seemed to her so atrocious and odious because they were, for her, the silly pomp of a schoolboy-man's game. . . . Campion, or some similar schoolboy, said: 'Hullo! Some German airplanes about. . . . That lets us out on the air-gun! Let's have some pops!' . . . As they fire guns in the park on the King's birthday. It was sheer insolence to have a gun in the garden of an hotel where people of quality might be sleeping or wishing to converse!

At home she had been able to sustain the conviction that it was such a game. . . . Anywhere: at the house of a minister of the Crown, at dinner, she had only to say: 'Do

let us leave off talking of these odious things....' And immediately there would be ten or a dozen voices, the minister's included, to agree with Mrs Tietjens of Groby that they had altogether too much of it....

But here! ... She seemed to be in the very belly of the ugly affair.... It moved and moved, under your eyes dissolving, yet always there. As if you should try to follow one diamond of pattern in the coil of an immense snake that was in irrevocable motion.... It gave her a sense of despair: the engrossment of Tietjens, in common with the engrossment of this disreputable toper. She had never seen Tietjens put his head together with any soul before: he was the lonely buffalo.... Now! Anyone: any fatuous staff-officer, whom at home he would never so much as have spoken to: any trustworthy beer-sodden sergeant, any street urchin dressed up as orderly.... They had only to appear and all his mind went into a close-headed conference over some ignoble point in the child's game: the laundry, the chiropody, the religions, the bastards... of millions of the indistinguishable.... Or their deaths as well! But, in heaven's name what hypocrisy, or what inconceivable chicken-heartedness was this? They promoted this beanfeast of carnage for their own ends: they caused the deaths of men in inconceivable holocausts of pain and terror. Then they had crises of agony over the death of one single man. For it was plain to her that Tietjens was in the middle of a full nervous breakdown. Over one man's death! She had never seen him so suffer; she had never seen him so appeal for sympathy: him, a cold fiend of reticence! Yet he was now in an agony! *Now!* ... And she began to have a sense of the infinitely spreading welter of pain, going away to an eternal horizon of night.... 'Ell for the Other Ranks! Apparently it was hell for the officers as well.

The real compassion in the voice of that snuffling, half-drunken old man had given her a sense of that enormous wickedness.... These horrors, these infinities of pain, this atrocious condition of the world had been brought about

in order that men should indulge themselves in orgies of promiscuity. . . . That in the end was at the bottom of male honour, of male virtue, observance of treaties, upholding of the flag. . . . An immense warlock's carnival of appetites, lusts, ebrieties. . . . And once set in motion there was no stopping it. . . . This state of things would never cease. . . . Because once they had tasted of the joy—the blood—of this game, who would let it end? . . . These men talked of these things that occupied them there with the lust of men telling dirty stories in smoking-rooms. . . . That was the only parallel!

There was no stopping it, any more than there was any stopping the by now all but intoxicated ex-sergeant major. He was off! With, as might be expected, advice to a young couple with differences of opinion! The wine had made him bold!

In the depth of her pictures of these horrors, snatches of his wisdom penetrated to her intelligence. . . . Queer snatches. . . . She was getting it certainly in the neck! . . . Someone, to add to the noise, had started some mechanical musical instrument in an adjacent hall.

‘Corn an’ lasses
Served by Ras’us!’

a throaty voice proclaimed,

‘I’d be tickled to death to know that I could go
And stay right there . . .’

The ex-sergeant-major was adding to her knowledge the odd detail that when he, Sergeant-Major Cowley, went to the wars—seven of them—his missus, Mrs Cowley, spent the first three days and nights unpicking and re-hemstitching every sheet and pillow-slip in the ’ouse. To keep ’erself f’m thinking. . . . This was apparently meant as a reproof or an exhortation to her, Sylvia Tietjens. . . . Well, he was all right! Of the same class as Father Consett, and with the same sort of wisdom.

The gramophone howled: a new note of rumbling added

itself to the exterior tumult and continued through six mitigated thumps of the gun in the garden. . . . In the next interval, Cowley was in the midst of a valedictory address to her. He was asking her to remember that the captain had had a sleepless night the night before.

There occurred to her irreverent mind a sentence of one of the Duchess of Marlborough's letters to Queen Anne. The duchess had visited the general during one of his campaigns in Flanders. 'My Lord,' she wrote, 'did me the honour three times in his boots!' . . . The sort of thing she would remember. . . . She would—she *would*—have tried it on the sergeant-major, just to see Tietjens' face, for the sergeant-major would not have understood. . . . And who cared if he did! . . . He was bibulously skirting round the same idea. . . .

But the tumult increased to an incredible volume: even the thrillings of the near-by gramophone of two hundred horse-power, or whatever it was, became mere shimmerings of a gold thread in a drab fabric of sound. She screamed blasphemies that she was hardly aware of knowing. She had to scream against the noise: she was no more responsible for the blasphemy than if she had lost her identity under an anaesthetic. She *had* lost her identity. . . . She was one of this crowd!

The general woke in his chair and gazed malevolently at their group as if they alone were responsible for the noise. It dropped. Dead! You only knew it, because you caught the tail end of a belated woman's scream from the hall and the general shouting: 'For God's sake don't start that damned gramophone again!' In the blessed silence, after preliminary wheezes and guitar noises, an astonishing voice burst out:

'Less than the dust . . .
Before thy char . . .'

And then, stopping after a murmur of voices, began:

'Pale hands I loved . . .'

The general sprang from his chair and rushed to the hall. . . . He came back crestfallenly.

'It's some damned civilian big-wig. . . . A novelist, they say. . . . I can't stop *him*. . . .' He added with disgust: 'The hall's full of young beasts and harlots. . . . *Dancing!*' . . . The melody had indeed, after a buzz, changed to a languorous and interrupted variation of a waltz. 'Dancing in the dark!' the general said with enhanced disgust. . . . 'And the Germans may be here at any moment. . . . If they knew what I know! . . .'

Sylvia called across to him:

'Wouldn't it be fun to see the blue uniform with the silver buttons again and some decently set-up men? . . .'

The general shouted:

'I'd be glad to see them. . . . I'm sick to death of these. . . .'

Tietjens took up something he had been saying to Cowley: what it was Sylvia did not hear, but Cowley answered, still droning on with an idea Sylvia thought they had got past:

'I remember when I was sergeant in Quetta, I detailed a man—called Herring—for watering the company horses, after he begged off it because he had a fear of horses. . . . A horse got him down in the river and drowned 'im. . . . Fell with him and put its foot on his face. . . . A fair sight he was. . . . It wasn't any good my saying anything about military exigencies. . . . Fair put me off my feed, it did. . . . Cost me a fortune in Epsom salts. . . .'

Sylvia was about to scream out that if Tietjens did not like men being killed it ought to sober him in his war-lust, but Cowley continued meditatively:

'Epsom salts they say is the cure for it. . . . For seeing your dead. . . . And of course you should keep off women for a fortnight. . . . I know I did. Kept seeing Herring's face with the hoof-mark. And . . . there was a piece: a decent bit of goods in what we called the Government Compound. . . .'

He suddenly exclaimed:

'Saving your . . . Ma'am, I'm . . .' He stuck the stump of the cigar into his teeth and began assuring Tietjens that he could be trusted with the draft next morning, if only Tietjens would put him into the taxi.

He went away, leaning on Tietjens' arm, his legs at an angle of sixty degrees with the carpet. . . .

'He can't . . .' Sylvia said to herself, 'he can't, not . . . If he's a gentleman. . . . After all that old fellow's hints. . . . He'd be a damn coward if he kept off. . . . For a fortnight. . . . And who else is there not a public . . .' She said: 'O God! . . .'

The old general, lying in his chair, turned his face aside to say:

'I wouldn't, madam, not if I were you, talk about the blue uniform with silver buttons here. . . . *We*, of course, understand. . . .'

She said: 'You see . . . even that extinct volcano . . . He's undressing me with his eyes full of blood veins. . . . Then why can't *he*? . . .'

She said aloud:

'Oh, but even you, general, said you were sick of your companions!'

She said to herself:

'Hang it! . . . I will have the courage of my convictions. . . . No man shall say I am a coward. . . .'

She said:

'Isn't it saying the same thing as you, general, to say that I'd rather be made love to by a well-set-up man in blue and silver—or anything else!—than by most of the people one sees here! . . .'

The general said:

'Of course, if you put it that way, madam. . . .'

She said:

'What other way should a woman put it?' . . . She reached to the table and filled herself a lot of brandy. The old general was leering towards her:

'Bless me,' he said, 'a lady who takes liquor like that . . .'

She said:

'You're a Papist, aren't you? With the name of O'Hara and the touch of the brogue you have . . . And the devil you no doubt are with. . . . You know what. . . . Well, then . . . It's with a special intention! . . . As you say your Hail Maries. . . .'

With the liquor burning inside her she saw Tietjens loom in the dim light.

The general, to her bitter amusement, said to him:

'Your friend was more than a bit on. . . . Not the society surely for madam!'

Tietjens said:

'I never expected to have the pleasure of dining with Mrs Tietjens to-night. . . . That officer was celebrating his commission and I could not put him off. . . .' The general said: 'Oh, ah! . . . Of course not. . . . I dare say . . . ' and settled himself again in his chair. . . .

Tietjens was overwhelming her with his great bulk. She had still lost her breath. . . . He stooped over and said: it was the luck of the half-drunk; he said:

'They're dancing in the lounge. . . .'

She coiled herself passionately into her wickerwork. It had dull blue cushions. She said:

'Not with anyone else. . . . I don't want any introductions. . . . ' Fiercely! . . . He said:

'There's no one there that I could introduce you to . . . '

She said:

'Not if it's a charity!'

He said:

'I thought it might be rather dull. . . . It's six months since I danced. . . . ' She felt beauty flowing over all her limbs. She had a gown of gold tissue. Her matchless hair was coiled over her ears. . . . She was humming Venusberg music: she knew music if she knew nothing else. . . .

She said: 'You call the compounds where you keep the W.A.A.C.'s Venusbergs, don't you? Isn't it queer that Venus should be your own? . . . Think of poor Elisabeth!'

The room where they were dancing was very dark. . . . It was queer to be in his arms. . . . She had known better

dancers.... He had looked ill.... Perhaps he was.... Oh, poor Valentine-Elisabeth.... What a funny position!.... The good gramophone played.... *Destiny!*.... You see, father!.... In his arms!.... Of course, dancing is not really.... But so near the real thing! So near!.... 'Good luck to the special intention!....' She had almost kissed him on the lips.... All but!.... *Effleurer*, the French call it.... But she was not as humble.... He had pressed her tighter.... All these months without.... My lord did me honour.... Good for Malbrouck *s'en va-t-en guerre*.... He *knew* she had almost kissed him on the lips.... And that his lips had almost responded.... The civilian, the novelist, had turned out the last light.... Tietjens said, 'Hadn't we better talk?....' She said: 'In my room, then! I'm dog-tired.... I haven't slept for six nights.... In spite of drugs....' He said: 'Yes. Of course! Where else?....' Astonishingly.... Her gown of gold tissue was like the colobium sindonis the King wore at the coronation.... As they mounted the stairs she thought what a fat tenor Tannhäuser always was!.... The Venusberg music was dinning in her ears.... She said: 'Sixty-six inexpressibles! I'm as sober as a judge.... I need to be!'

PART THREE

I

A SHADOW—the shadow of the General Officer Commanding in Chief—falling across the bar of light that the sunlight threw in at his open door seemed providentially to awaken Christopher Tietjens, who would have thought it extremely disagreeable to be found asleep by that officer. Very thin, graceful and gay with his scarlet gilt oak-leaves, and ribbons, of which he had many, the general was stepping attractively over the sill of the door, talking backwards over his shoulder, to someone outside. So, in the old days, Gods had descended! It was, no doubt, really the voices from without that had awakened Tietjens, but he preferred to think the matter a slight intervention of Providence, because he felt in need of a sign of some sort! Immediately upon awakening he was not perfectly certain of where he was, but he had sense enough to answer with coherence the first question that the general put to him and to stand stiffly on his legs. The general had said:

‘Will you be good enough to inform me, Captain Tietjens, why you have no fire-extinguishers in your unit? You are aware of the extremely disastrous consequences that would follow a conflagration in your lines?’

Tietjens said stiffly:

‘It seems impossible to obtain them, sir.’

The general said:

‘How is this? You have indented for them in the proper quarter? Perhaps you do not know what the proper quarter is?’

Tietjens said:

'If this were a British unit, sir, the proper quarter would be the Royal Engineers.' When he had sent his indent in for them to the Royal Engineers they informed him that this being a unit of troops from the Dominions, the quarter to which to apply was the Ordnance. On applying to the Ordnance, he was informed that no provision was made of fire-extinguishers for troops from the Dominions under Imperial officers, and that the proper course was to obtain them from a civilian firm in Great Britain, charging them against barrack damages. . . . He had applied to several firms of manufacturers, who all replied that they were forbidden to sell these articles to anyone but to the War Office direct. . . . 'I am still applying to civilian firms,' he finished.

The officer accompanying the general was Colonel Levin, to whom, over his shoulder, the general said: 'Make a note of that, Levin, will you? and get the matter looked into.' He said again to Tietjens:

'In walking across your parade-ground I noticed that your officer in charge of your physical training knew conspicuously nothing about it. You had better put him on to cleaning out your drains. He was unreasonably dirty.'

Tietjens said:

'The sergeant-instructor, sir, is quite competent. The officer is an R.A.S.C. officer. I have at the moment hardly any infantry officers in the unit. But officers have to be on these parades—by A.C.I. They give no orders.'

The general said dryly:

'I am aware from the officer's uniform of what arm he belonged to. I am not saying you do not do your best with the material at your command.' From Campion on parade this was an extraordinary graciousness. Behind the general's back Levin was making signs with his eyes which he meaningly closed and opened. The general, however, remained extraordinarily dry in manner, his face having its perfectly expressionless air of studied politeness which allowed no muscle of its polished-cherry surface to move.

The extreme politeness of the extremely great to the supremely unimportant!

He glanced round the hut markedly. It was Tietjens' own office and contained nothing but the blanket-covered tables and, hanging from a strut, an immense calendar on which days were roughly crossed out in red ink and blue pencil. He said:

'Go and get your belt. You will go round your cook-houses with me in a quarter of an hour. You can tell your sergeant-cook. What sort of cooking arrangements have you?'

Tietjens said:

'Very good cook-houses, sir.'

The general said:

'You're extremely lucky, then. Extremely lucky!... Half the units like yours in this camp haven't anything but company cookers and field ovens in the open....' He pointed with his crop at the open door. He repeated with extreme distinctness 'Go and get your belt!' Tietjens wavered a very little on his feet. He said:

'You are aware, sir, that I am under arrest.'

Campion imported a threat into his voice:

'I gave you,' he said, 'an order. To perform a duty!'

The terrific force of the command from above to below took Tietjens staggering through the door. He heard the general's voice say: 'I'm perfectly aware he's not drunk.' When he had gone four paces Colonel Levin was beside him.

Levin was supporting him by the elbow. He whispered:

'The general wishes me to go with you if you are feeling unwell. You understand you are released from arrest!' He exclaimed with a sort of rapture: 'You're doing splendidly. ... It's amazing. Everything I've ever told him about you. ... Yours is the only draft that got off this morning....'

Tietjens grunted:

'Of course I understand that if I'm given an order to perform a duty, it means I am released from arrest.' He had next to no voice. He managed to say that he would

prefer to go alone. He said: '... He's forced my hand. ... The last thing I want is to be released from arrest. ...'

Levin said breathlessly:

'You *can't* refuse. ... You can't upset him. ... Why, you *can't*. ... Besides, an officer cannot demand a court martial.'

'You look,' Tietjens said, 'like a slightly faded bunch of wallflowers. ... I'm sure I beg your pardon. ... It came into my head!' The colonel drooped intangibly, his moustache a little ragged, his eyes a little rimmed, his shaving a little ridged. He exclaimed:

'Damn it! ... Do you suppose I don't *care* what happens to you? ... O'Hara came storming into my quarters at half-past three. ... I'm not going to tell you what he said ...' Tietjens said gruffly:

'No, don't! I've all I can stand for the moment. ...'

Levin exclaimed desperately:

'I want you to understand. ... It's impossible to believe anything against. ...'

Tietjens faced him, his teeth showing like a badger's. He said:

'Whom? ... Against whom? Curse you!'

Levin said pallidly:

'Against ... Against ... either of you. ...'

'Then leave it at that!' Tietjens said. He staggered a little until he reached the main lines. Then he marched. It was purgatory. They peeped at him from the corners of huts and withdrew. ... But they always did peep at him from the corners of huts and withdraw! That is the habit of the Other Ranks on perceiving officers. The fellow called McKechnie also looked out of a hut door. He too withdrew. ... There was no mistaking that! He had the news. ... On the other hand, McKechnie too was under a cloud. It might be his, Tietjens', duty, to strafe McKechnie to hell for having left camp last night. So he might be avoiding him. ... There was no knowing. ... He lurched infinitesimally to the right. The road was rough. His legs felt like detached and swollen objects that he

dragged after him. He must master his legs. He mastered his legs. A batman carrying a cup of tea ran against him. Tietjens said: 'Put that down and fetch me the sergeant-cook at the double. Tell him the general's going round the cook-houses in a quarter of an hour.' The batman ran, spilling the tea in the sunlight.

In his hut, which was dim and profusely decorated with the doctor's ideals of female beauty in every known form of pictorial reproduction, so that it might have been lined with peach-blossom, Tietjens had the greatest difficulty in getting into his belt. He had at first forgotten to remove his hat, then he put his head through the wrong opening; his fingers on the buckles operated like sausages. He inspected himself in the doctor's cracked shaving-glass; he was exceptionally well shaved.

He had shaved that morning at six-thirty: five minutes after the draft had got off. Naturally, the lorries had been an hour late. It was providential that he had shaved with extra care. An insolently calm man was looking at him, the face divided in two by the crack in the glass: a naturally white-complexioned double-half of a face: a patch of high colour on each cheekbone; the pepper-and-salt hair ruffled, the white streaks extremely silver. He had gone very silver lately. But he swore he did not look worn. Not careworn. McKechnie said from behind his back:

'By Jove, what's this all about? The general's been strafing me to hell for not having my table tidy!'

Tietjens, still looking in the glass, said:

'You should keep your table tidy. It's the only strafe the battalion's had.'

The general, then, must have been in the orderly room of which he had put McKechnie in charge. McKechnie went on, breathlessly:

'They say you knocked the general. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'Don't you know enough to discount what they say in this town?' He said to himself: 'That was all right!' He had spoken with a cool edge on a contemptuous voice.

He said to the sergeant-cook who was panting—another heavy, grey-moustached, very senior N.C.O.:

‘The general’s going round the cook-houses. . . . You be damn certain there’s no dirty cook’s clothing in the lockers!’ He was fairly sure that otherwise his cook-houses would be all right. He had gone round them himself the morning of the day before yesterday. Or was it yesterday? . . .

It was the day after he had been up all night because the draft had been countermanded. . . . It didn’t matter. He said:

‘I wouldn’t serve out white clothing to the cooks. . . . I bet you’ve got some hidden away, though it’s against orders.’

The sergeant looked away into the distance, smiled all-knowingly over his walrus moustache.

‘The general likes to see ’em in white,’ he said, ‘and he won’t know the white clothing has been countermanded.’

Tietjens said:

‘The snag is that the beastly cooks always will tuck some piece of beastly dirty clothing away in a locker rather than take the trouble to take it round to their quarters when they’ve changed.’

Levin said with great distinctness:

‘The general has sent me to you with this, Tietjens. Take a sniff of it if you’re feeling dicky. You’ve been up all night on end two nights running.’ He extended in the palm of his hand a bottle of smelling-salts in a silver section of tubing. He said the general suffered from vertigo now and then. Really he himself carried that restorative for the benefit of Miss de Bailly.

Tietjens asked himself why the devil the sight of that smelling-salts container reminded him of the brass handle of the bedroom door moving almost imperceptibly . . . and incredibly. It was, of course, because Sylvia had on her illuminated dressing-table, reflected by the glass, just such another smooth, silver segment of tubing. . . . Was every-

thing he saw going to remind him of the minute movement of that handle?

'You can do what you please,' the sergeant-cook said, 'but there will always be one piece of clothing in a locker of a G.O.C.I.C.'s inspection. And the general always walks straight up to that locker and has it opened. I've seen General Campion do it three times.'

'If there's any found this time, the man it belongs to goes for a D.C.M.,' Tietjens said. 'See that there's a clean diet-sheet on the messing board.'

'The generals really like to find dirty clothing,' the sergeant-cook said; 'it gives them something to talk about if they don't know anything else about cook-houses. . . . I'll put up my own diet-sheet, sir. . . . I suppose you can keep the general back for twenty minutes or so? It's all I ask.'

Levin said towards his rolling, departing back:

'That's a damn smart man. Fancy being as confident as that about an inspection. . . . Ugh! . . .' and Levin shuddered in remembrance of inspections through which in his time he had passed.

'He's a damn smart man!' Tietjens said. He added to McKechnie:

'You might take a look at dinners in case the general takes it into his head to go round them.'

McKechnie said darkly:

'Look here, Tietjens, are you in command of this unit or am I?'

Levin exclaimed sharply, for him:

'What's that? What the . . .'

Tietjens said:

'Captain McKechnie complains that he is the senior officer and should command this unit.'

Levin ejaculated:

'Of all the . . .' He addressed McKechnie with vigour: 'My man, the command of these units is an appointment at disposition of headquarters. Don't let there be any mistake about that!'

McKechnie said doggedly:

'Captain Tietjens asked me to take the battalion this morning. I understood he was under . . .'

'You,' Levin said, 'are attached to this unit for discipline and rations. You damn well understand that if some uncle or other of yours were not, to the general's knowledge, a protégé of Captain Tietjens', you'd be in a lunatic asylum at this moment. . . .'

McKechnie's face worked convulsively, he swallowed as men are said to swallow who suffer from hydrophobia. He lifted his fist and cried out:

'My un . . .'

Levin said:

'If you say another word you go under medical care the moment it's said. I've the order in my pocket. Now, fall out. At the double!'

McKechnie wavered on the way to the door. Levin added:

'You can take your choice of going up the line to-night. Or a court of inquiry for obtaining divorce leave and then not getting a divorce. Or the other thing. And you can thank Captain Tietjens for the clemency the general has shown you!'

The hut now reeling a little, Tietjens put the opened smelling bottle to his nostrils. At the sharp pang of the odour the hut came to attention. He said:

'We can't keep the general waiting.'

'He told me,' Levin said, 'to give you ten minutes. He's sitting in your hut. He's tired. This affair has worried him dreadfully. O'Hara is the first C.O. he ever served under. A useful man, too, at his job.'

Tietjens leaned against his dressing-table of meat-cases.

'You told that fellow McKechnie off, all right,' he said. 'I did not know you had it in you. . . .'

'Oh,' Levin said, 'it's just being with *him*. . . I get his manner and it does all right. . . Of course I don't often hear him have to strafe anybody in that manner. There's nobody really to stand up to him. Naturally. . . But just

this morning I was in his cabinet doing private secretary, and he was talking to Pe... Talking while he shaved. And he said exactly that: You can take your choice of going up the line to-night or a court martial... So naturally I said as near the same as I could to your little friend....'

Tietjens said:

'We'd better go now.'

In the winter sunlight Levin tucked his arm under Tietjens', leaning towards him gaily and not hurrying. The display was insufferable to Tietjens, but he recognized that it was indispensable. The bright day seemed full of things with hard edges—a rather cruel definiteness.... Liver!...

The little depot adjutant passed them going very fast, as if before a wind. Levin just waved his hand in acknowledgment of his salute and went on, being enraptured in Tietjens' conversation. He said:

'You and... and Mrs Tietjens are dining at the general's to-night. To meet the G.O.C.I.C. Western Division. And General O'Hara.... We understand that you have definitely separated from Mrs Tietjens....' Tietjens forced his left arm to violence to restrain it from tearing itself from the colonel's grasp.

His mind had become a coffin-headed, leather-jawed charger, like Schomburg. Sitting on his mind was like sitting on Schomburg at a dull water-jump. His lips said: 'Bub-bub-bub-bub!' He could not feel his hands. He said:

'I recognize the necessity. If the general sees it in that way. I saw it in another way myself.' His voice was intensely weary. 'No doubt,' he said, 'the general knows best!'

Levin's face exhibited real enthusiasm. He said:

'You decent fellow! You awfully decent fellow! We're all in the same boat.... Now, will you tell me? For *him*. Was O'Hara drunk last night or wasn't he?'

Tietjens said:

'I think he was not drunk when he burst into the room with Major Perowne.... I've been thinking about it! I think he became drunk.... When I first requested and

then ordered him to leave the room he leant against the doorpost. . . . He was certainly then—in disorder! . . . I then told him that I should order him under arrest, if he didn't go. . . .'

Levin said:

'Mm! Mm! Mm!'

Tietjens said:

'It was my obvious duty . . . I assure you that I was perfectly collected. . . . I beg to assure you that I was perfectly collected. . . .'

Levin said: 'I am not questioning the correctness. . . . But . . . we are all one family. . . . I admit the atrocious . . . the unbearable nature. . . . But you understand that O'Hara had the right to enter your room. . . . As P.M.! . . .'

Tietjens said:

'I am not questioning that it was his right. I was assuring you that I was perfectly collected because the general had honoured me by asking my opinion on the condition of General O'Hara. . . .'

They had by now walked far beyond the line leading to Tietjens' office and, close together, were looking down upon the great tapestry of the French landscape.

'He,' Levin said, 'is anxious for your opinion. It really amounts to as to whether O'Hara drinks too much to continue in his job! . . . And he says he will take your word. . . . You could not have a greater testimonial. . . .'

'He could not,' Tietjens said studiously, 'do anything less. Knowing me.'

Levin said:

'Good heavens, old man, you rub it in!' He added quickly: 'He wishes me to dispose of this side of the matter. He will take my word and yours. You will forgive. . . .'

The mind of Tietjens had completely failed: the Seine below looked like an S on fire in an opal. He said: 'Eh?' And then: 'Oh, yes! I forgive. . . . It's painful. . . . You probably don't know what you are doing.'

He broke off suddenly:

'By God! . . . Were the Canadian Railway Service to

go with my draft? They were detailed to mend the line here to-day. Also to go... I kept them back... Both orders were dated the same day and hour. I could not get on to headquarters either from the hotel or from here...'

Levin said:

'Yes, that's all right. He'll be immensely pleased. He's going to speak to you about *that!*' Tietjens gave an immense sigh of relief.

'I remembered that my orders were conflicting just before... It was a terrible shock to remember... If I sent them up in the lorries, the repairs to the railway might be delayed... If I didn't, you might get strafed to hell... It was an intolerable worry...'

Levin said:

'You remembered it just as you saw the handle of your door moving...'

Tietjens said from a sort of a mist:

'Yes. You know how beastly it is when you suddenly remember you have forgotten something in orders. As if the pit of your stomach had...'

Levin said:

'All I ever thought about if I'd forgotten anything was what would be a good excuse to put up to the adjutant... When I was a regimental officer...'

Suddenly Tietjens said insistently:

'How did you know that?... About the door handle? Sylvia couldn't have seen it... He added: 'And she could not have known what I was thinking... She had her back to the door... And to me... Looking at me in the glass... She was not even aware of what had happened... So she could not have seen the handle move!'

Levin hesitated:

'I...' he said. 'Perhaps I ought not to have said that... You've told us... That is to say, you've told...' He was pale in the sunlight. He said: 'Old man... Perhaps you don't know... Didn't you perhaps ever, in your childhood?'

Tietjens said:

‘Well . . . What is it?’

‘That you talk . . . when you’re sleeping!’ Levin said.

Astonishingly, Tietjens said:

‘What of that? . . . It’s nothing to write home about! With the overwork I’ve had and the sleeplessness. . . .’

Levin said, with a pathetic appeal to Tietjens’ omniscience:

‘But doesn’t it mean . . . We used to say when we were boys . . . that if you talk in your sleep . . . you’re . . . in fact a bit dotty?’

Tietjens said without passion:

‘Not necessarily. It means that one has been under mental pressure, but all mental pressure does not drive you over the edge. Not by any means. . . . Besides, what does it matter?’

Levin said:

‘You mean you don’t care. . . . Good God!’ He remained looking at the view, drooping, in intense dejection. He said: ‘This *beastly* war! This *beastly* war! . . . Look at all that view. . . .’

Tietjens said:

‘It’s an encouraging spectacle, really. The beastliness of human nature is always pretty normal. We lie and betray and are wanting in imagination and deceive ourselves, always, at about the same rate. In peace and in war! But, somewhere in that view there are enormous bodies of men. . . . If you got a still more extended range of view over this whole front you’d have still more enormous bodies of men. . . . Seven to ten million. . . . All moving towards places towards which they desperately don’t want to go. Desperately! Every one of them is desperately afraid. But they go on. An immense blind will forces them in the effort to consummate the one decent action that humanity has to its credit in the whole of recorded history. The one we are engaged in. That effort is the one certain creditable fact in all their lives. . . . But the *other* lives of all those men are

dirty, potty and discreditable little affairs. . . . Like yours. . . . Like mine. . . .'

Levin exclaimed:

'Just heavens! *What* a pessimist you are!'

Tietjens said: 'Can't you see that that is optimism?'

'But,' Levin said, 'we're being beaten out of the field. . . . You don't know how desperate things are.'

Tietjens said :

'Oh, I know pretty well. As soon as this weather really breaks we're probably done.'

'We can't,' Levin said, 'possibly hold them. Not possibly.'

'But success or failure,' Tietjens said, 'have nothing to do with the credit of a story. And a consideration of the virtues of humanity does not omit the other side. If we lose they win. If success is necessary to your idea of virtue—*virtus*—they then provide the success instead of ourselves. But the thing is to be able to stick to the integrity of your character, whatever earthquake sets the house tumbling over your head. . . . That, thank God, we're doing. . . .'

Levin said:

'I don't know. . . . If you knew what is going on at home. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'Oh, I know. . . . I know that ground as I know the palm of my hand. I could invent that life if I knew nothing at all about the facts.'

Levin said:

'I believe you could.' He added: 'Of course you could. . . . And yet the only use we can make of you is to martyrize you because two drunken brutes break into your wife's bedroom. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'You betray your non-Anglo-Saxon origin by being so vocal. . . . And by your illuminative exaggerations!'

Levin suddenly exclaimed:

'What the devil were we talking about?'

Tietjens said grimly:

'I am here at the disposal of the competent military authority—You!—that is inquiring into my antecedents. I am ready to go on belching platitudes till you stop me.'

Levin answered:

'For goodness' sake help me. This is horribly painful. *He*—the general—has given me the job of finding out what happened last night. He won't face it himself. He's attached to you both.'

Tietjens said:

'It's asking too much to ask me to help you. . . . What did I say in my sleep? What has Mrs Tietjens told the general?'

'The general,' Levin said, 'has not seen Mrs Tietjens. He could not trust himself. He knew she would twist him round her little finger.'

Tietjens said:

'He's beginning to learn. He was sixty last July, but he's beginning.'

'So that,' Levin said, 'what we do know we learnt in the way I have told you. And from O'Hara of course. The general would not let Pe . . . , the other fellow, speak a word, while he was shaving. He just said: "I won't hear you. I won't hear you. You can take your choice of going up the line as soon as there are trains running or being broke on my personal application to the King in Council."'

'I didn't know,' Tietjens said, 'that he could talk as straight as that.'

'He's dreadfully hard hit,' Levin answered; 'if you and Mrs Tietjens separate—and still more if there's anything real against either of you—it's going to shatter all his illusions. And . . .' He paused: 'Do you know Major Thurston? A gunner? Attached to our anti-aircraft crowd? . . . The general is very thick with him. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'He's one of the Thurston's of Lobden Moorside. . . . I don't know him personally. . . .'

Levin said:

'He's upset the general a good deal. . . . With something he told him. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'Good God!' And then: 'He can't have told the general anything against me. . . . Then it must be against . . .'

Levin said:

'Do you want the general always to be told things against you in contradistinction to things about . . . another person?'

Tietjens said:

'We shall be keeping the fellows in my cook-house a confoundedly long time waiting for inspections. . . . I'm in your hands as regards the general. . . .'

Levin said:

'The general's in your hut: thankful to goodness to be alone. He never is. He said he was going to write a private memorandum for the Secretary of State, and I could keep you any time I liked as long as I got everything out of you. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'Did what Major Thurston allege take place . . . Thurston has lived most of his life in France. . . . But you had better not tell me. . . .'

Levin said:

'He's our anti-aircraft liaison officer with the French civilian authorities. Those sort of fellows generally have lived in France a good deal. A very decentish, quiet man. He plays chess with the general and they talk over the chess. . . . But the general is going to talk about what he said to you himself. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'Good God! . . . He going to talk as well as you. . . . You'd say the coils were closing in. . . .'

Levin said:

'We can't go on like this. . . . It's my own fault for not being more direct. But this can't last all day. We could neither of us stand it. . . . I'm pretty nearly done. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'Where *did* your father come from, really? Not from Frankfurt? . . .'

Levin said:

'Constantinople. . . . His father was financial agent to the Sultan; my father was his son by an Armenian presented to him by the Selamlık along with the Order of the Medjidje, first class.'

'It accounts for your very decent manner, and for your common sense. If you had been English I should have broken your neck before now.'

Levin said:

'Thank you! I hope I always behave like an English gentleman. But I am going to be brutally direct now. . . .' He went on: 'The really queer thing is that you should always address Miss Wannop in the language of the Victorian *Correct Letter-Writer*. You must excuse my mentioning the name: it shortens things. You said "Miss Wannop" every two or three half-minutes. It convinced the general more than any possible assertions that your relations were perfectly . . .'

Tietjens, his eyes shut, said:

'I talked to Miss Wannop in my sleep. . . .'

Levin, who was shaking a little, said:

'It was very queer. . . . Almost ghostlike. . . . There you sat, your arms on the table. Talking away. You appeared to be writing a letter to her. And the sunlight streaming in at the hut. I was going to wake you, but he stopped me. He took the view that he was on detective work, and that he might as well detect. He had got it into his mind that you were a Socialist.'

'He would,' Tietjens commented. 'Didn't I tell you he was beginning to learn things? . . .'

Levin exclaimed:

'But you aren't a So . . .'

Tietjens said:

'Of course, if your father came from Constantinople and his mother was a Georgian, it accounts for your attractiveness. You *are* a most handsome fellow. And intelligent. . . . If the general has put you on to inquire whether I am a Socialist I will answer your questions.'

Levin said:

'No. . . . That's one of the questions he's reserving for himself to ask. It appears that if you answer that you are a Socialist he intends to cut you out of his will. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'His will! . . . Oh, yes, of course, he might very well leave me something. But doesn't that supply rather a motive for me to say that I *am*? I don't want this money.'

Levin positively jumped a step backwards. Money, and particularly money that came by way of inheritance, being one of the sacred things of life for him, he exclaimed:

'I don't see that you *can* joke about such a subject!'

Tietjens answered good-humouredly:

'Well, you don't expect me to play up to the old gentleman in order to get his poor old shekels.' He added: 'Hadn't we better get it over?'

Levin said:

'You've got hold of yourself?'

Tietjens answered:

'Pretty well. . . . You'll excuse my having been emotional so far. You aren't English, so it won't have embarrassed you.'

Levin exclaimed in an outraged manner:

'Hang it, I'm English to the backbone! What's the matter with me?'

Tietjens said:

'Nothing. . . . Nothing in the world. That's just what makes you un-English. We're all . . . well, it doesn't matter what's wrong with *us*. . . . What did you gather about my relations with Miss Wannop?'

The question was unemotionally put and Levin was still so concerned as to his origins that he did not at first grasp what Tietjens had said. He began to protest that he had been educated at Winchester and Magdalen. Then he exclaimed, '*Oh!*' And took time for reflection.

'If,' he said finally, 'the general had not let out that she was young and attractive . . . at least, I suppose attractive . . . I should have thought that you regarded her as an old

maid. . . . You know, of course, that it came to me as a shock, the thought that there was anyone. . . . That you had allowed yourself . . . Anyhow . . . I suppose that I'm simple. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'What did the general gather?'

'He . . . ' Levin said, 'he stood over you with his head held to one side, looking rather cunning . . . like a magpie listening at a hole it's dropped a nut into. . . . First he looked disappointed: then quite glad. A simple kind of gladness. Just glad, you know. . . . When we got outside the hut he said "I suppose in *vino veritas*," and then he asked me the Latin for "sleep". . . But I had forgotten it too. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'What did I say?'

'It's . . . ' Levin hesitated, 'extraordinarily difficult to say what you *did* say. . . . I don't profess to remember long speeches to the letter. . . . Naturally it was a good deal broken up. . . . I tell you, you were talking to a young lady about matters you don't generally talk to young ladies about. . . . And obviously you were trying to let your . . . Mrs Tietjens, down easily. . . . You were trying to explain also why you had definitely decided to separate from Mrs Tietjens. . . . And you took it that the young lady might be troubled . . . at the separation. . . .'

Tietjens said carelessly:

'This is rather painful. Perhaps you would let me tell you exactly what *did* happen last night. . . .'

Levin said:

'If you only would!' He added rather diffidently: 'If you would not mind remembering that I am a military court of inquiry. It makes it easier for me to report to the general if you say things dully and in the order they happened.'

Tietjens said:

'Thank you . . . ' and after a short interval, 'I retired to rest with my wife last night at. . . . I cannot say the hour exactly. Say half-past one. I reached this camp at half-past

four, taking rather over half an hour to walk. What happened, as I am about to relate, took place therefore before four.'

'The hour,' Levin said, 'is not material. We know the incident occurred in the small hours. General O'Hara made his complaint to me at three-thirty-five. He probably took five minutes to reach my quarters.'

Tietjens asked:

'The exact charge was ...'

'The complaints,' Levin answered, 'were very numerous indeed. . . . I could not catch them all. The succinct charge was at first being drunk and striking a superior officer, then merely that of conduct prejudicial in that you struck . . . There is also a subsidiary charge of conduct prejudicial in that you improperly marked a charge-sheet in your orderly room. . . . I did not catch what all that was about. . . . You appear to have had a quarrel with him about his red caps. . . .'

'That,' Tietjens said, 'is what it is really all about.' He asked: 'The officer I was said to have struck was ...?'

Levin said:

'Perowne ...' dryly.

Tietjens said:

'You are sure it was not himself. I am prepared to plead guilty to striking General O'Hara.'

'It is not,' Levin said, 'a question of pleading guilty. There is no charge to that effect against you, and you are perfectly aware that you are not under arrest. . . . An order to perform any duty after you have been placed under arrest in itself releases you and dissolves the arrest.'

Tietjens said coolly:

'I am perfectly aware of that. And that that was General Campion's intention in ordering me to accompany him round my cook-houses. . . . But I doubt. . . . I put it to you for your serious attention whether that is the best way to hush this matter up. . . . I think it would be more expedient that I should plead guilty to a charge of striking General O'Hara. And naturally to being drunk. An officer does not

strike a general when he is sober. That would be a quite inconspicuous affair. Subordinate officers are broken every day for being drunk.'

Levin had said 'Wait a minute,' twice. He now exclaimed with a certain horror:

'Your mania for sacrificing yourself makes you lose all . . . all sense of proportion. You forget that General Cam-pion is a gentleman. Things cannot be done in a hole-and-corner manner in this command. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'They're done unbearably. . . . It would be nothing to me to be broke for being drunk, but raking up all this is hell.'

Levin said:

'The general is anxious to know exactly what has happened. You will kindly accept an order to relate exactly what happened.'

Tietjens said:

'That is what is perfectly damnable. . . .' He remained silent for nearly a minute, Levin slapping his leggings with his riding-crop in a nervously passionate rhythm. Tietjens stiffened himself and began:

'General O'Hara came to my wife's room and burst in the door. I was there. I took him to be drunk. But from what he exclaimed I have since imagined that he was not so much drunk as misled. There was another man lying in the corridor where I had thrown him. General O'Hara exclaimed that this was Major Perowne. I had not realized that this was Major Perowne. I do not know Major Perowne very well and he was not in uniform. I had imagined him to be a French waiter coming to call me to the telephone. I had seen only his face round the door: he was looking round the door. My wife was in a state . . . bordering on nudity. I had put my hand under his chin and thrown him through the doorway. I am physically very strong and I exercised all my strength. I am aware of that. I was excited, but not more excited than the circumstances seemed to call for. . . .'

Levin exclaimed:

'But . . . At three in the morning! The telephone!'

'I was ringing up my headquarters and yours. All through the night. The O.I.C. draft, Lieutenant Cowley, was also ringing me up. I was anxious to know what was to be done about the Canadian railway men. I had three times been called to the telephone since I had been in Mrs Tietjens' room, and once an orderly had come down from the camp. I was also conducting a very difficult conversation with my wife as to the disposal of my family's estates, which are large, so that the details were complicated. I occupied the room next door to Mrs Tietjens and till that moment, the communicating door between the rooms being open, I had heard when a waiter or an orderly had knocked at my own door in the corridor. The night porter of the hotel was a dark, untidy, surly sort of fellow. . . . Not unlike Perowne.'

Levin said:

'Is it necessary to go into all this? We . . .'

Tietjens said:

'If I am to make a statement it seems necessary. I would prefer you to question me . . .'

Levin said:

'Please go on. . . . We accept the statement that Major Perowne was not in uniform. He states that he was in his pyjamas and dressing-gown. Looking for the bathroom.'

Tietjens said: 'Ah!' and stood reflecting. He said:

'May I hear the . . . purport of Major Perowne's statement?'

'He states,' Levin said, 'what I have just said. He was looking for the bathroom. He had not slept in the hotel before. He opened a door and looked round it, and was immediately thrown with great violence down into the passage with his head against the wall. He says that this dazed him so that, not really appreciating what had happened, he shouted various accusations against the person who had assaulted him. . . . General O'Hara then came out of his room. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'What accusations did Major Perowne shout?'

'He doesn't. . . .' Levin hesitated, 'eh! . . . elaborate them in his statement.'

Tietjens said:

'It is, I imagine, material that I should know what they are. . . .'

Levin said:

'I don't know that. . . . If you'll forgive me . . . Major Perowne came to see me, reaching me half an hour after General O'Hara. He was very . . . extremely nervous and concerned. I am bound to say . . . for Mrs. Tietjens. . . . And also very concerned to spare yourself! . . . It appears that he had shouted out just anything. . . . As it might be "Thieves!" or "Fire!" . . . But when General O'Hara came out he told him, being out of himself, that he had been invited to your wife's room, and that . . . Oh, excuse me. . . . I'm under great obligations to you . . . the very greatest . . . that you had attempted to blackmail him!'

Tietjens said:

'Well! . . .'

'You understand,' Levin said, and he was pleading, 'that that is what he said to General O'Hara in the corridor. He even confessed it was madness. . . . He did not maintain the accusation to me. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'Not that Mrs Tietjens had given him leave? . . .'

Levin said with tears in his eyes:

'I'll not go on with this. . . . I will rather resign my commission than go on tormenting you. . . .'

'You can't resign your commission,' Tietjens said.

'I can resign my appointment,' Levin answered. He went on sniffing: 'This beastly war! . . . This beastly war! . . .'

Tietjens said:

'If what is distressing you is having to tell me that you believe Major Perowne came with my wife's permission I know it's true. It's also true that my wife expected me to be there. She wanted some fun: not adultery. But I am

also aware—as Major Thurston appears to have told General Campion—that Mrs Tietjens was with Major Perowne. In France. At a place called Yssingueux-les-Pervanches. . . .’

‘That wasn’t the name,’ Levin blubbered. ‘It was Saint . . . Saint . . . Saint something. In the Cevennes. . . .’

Tietjens said:

‘Don’t, there! . . . Don’t distress yourself. . . .’

‘But I’m . . .’ Levin went on, ‘under great obligations to you. . . .’

‘I’d better,’ Tietjens said, ‘finish this matter myself.’

Levin said:

‘It will break the general’s heart. He believes so absolutely in Mrs Tietjens. Who wouldn’t? . . . How the devil could you guess what Major Thurston told him?’

‘He’s the sort of brown, trustworthy man who always does know that sort of thing,’ Tietjens answered. ‘As for the general’s belief in Mrs. Tietjens, he’s perfectly justified. . . . Only there will be no more parades. Sooner or later it has to come to that for us all. . . .’ He added with a little bitterness: ‘Only not for you. Being a Turk or a Jew you are a simple, Oriental, monogamous, faithful soul. . . .’ He added again: ‘I hope to goodness the sergeant-cook has the sense not to keep the men’s dinners back for the general’s inspection. . . . But of course he will not. . . .’

Levin said:

‘What in the world would that matter?’ fiercely. ‘He keeps men waiting as much as three hours. On parade.’

‘Of course,’ Tietjens said, ‘if that is what Major Perowne told General O’Hara it removes a good deal of my suspicions of the latter’s sobriety. Try to get the position. General O’Hara positively burst in the little sneck of the door that I had put down and came in shouting: “Where is the — blackmailer?” And it was a full three minutes before I could get rid of him. I had had the presence of mind to switch off the light and he persisted in asking for another look at Mrs Tietjens. You see, if you consider it, he is a very heavy sleeper. He is suddenly awakened after,

no doubt, not a few pegs. He hears Major Perowne shouting about blackmail and thieves. . . . I dare say this town has its quota of blackmailers. O'Hara might well be anxious to catch one in the act. He hates me, anyhow, because of his Red Caps. I'm a shabby-looking chap he doesn't know much about. Perowne passes for being a millionaire. I daresay he is: he's said to be very stingy. That would be how he got hold of the idea of blackmail and hypnotized the general with it. . . .'

He went on again:

'But I wasn't to know that. . . . I had shut the door on Perowne and didn't even know he was Perowne. I really thought he was the night porter coming to call me to the telephone. I only saw a roaring satyr. I mean that was what I thought O'Hara was. . . . And I assure you I kept my head. . . . When he persisted in leaning against the doorpost and asking for another look at Mrs Tietjens, he kept on saying: "The woman" and "The hussy." Not "Mrs Tietjens." . . . I thought then that there was something queer. I said: "This is my wife's room," several times. He said something to the effect of how could he know she was my wife, and . . . that she had made eyes at himself in the lounge, so it might have been himself as well as Perowne. . . . I dare say he had got it into his head that I had imported some tart to blackmail someone. . . . But you know. . . . I grew exhausted after a time. . . . I saw outside in the corridor one of the little subalterns he has on his staff, and I said: "If you do not take General O'Hara away I shall order you to put him under arrest for drunkenness." That seemed to drive the general crazy. I had gone closer to him, being determined to push him out of the door, and he decidedly smelt of whisky. Strongly. . . . But I dare say he was thinking himself outraged, really. And perhaps also coming to his senses. As there was nothing else for it I pushed him gently out of the room. In going he shouted that I was to consider myself under arrest. I so considered myself. . . . That is to say that, as soon as I had settled certain details with Mrs Tietjens, I walked up to the camp,

which I took to be my quarters, though I am actually under the M.O.'s orders to reside in this hotel owing to the state of my lungs. I saw the draft off, that not necessitating my giving any orders. I went to my sleeping quarters, it being then about six-thirty, and towards seven awakened McKechnie, whom I asked to take my adjutant's and battalion parade and orderly-room. I had breakfast in my hut, and then went into my private office to await developments. I think I have now told you everything material. . . .'

II

General Lord Edward Campion, G.C.B., K.C.M.G. (military), D.S.O., etc., sat, radiating glory and composing a confidential memorandum to the Secretary of State for War, on a bully-beef case, leaning forward over a military blanket that covered a deal table. He was for the moment in high good humour on the surface, though his subordinate minds were puzzled and depressed. At the end of each sentence that he wrote—and he wrote with increasing satisfaction!—a mind that he was not using said: 'What the devil am I going to do with that fellow?' Or: 'How the devil is that girl's name to be kept out of this mess?'

Having been asked to write a confidential memorandum for the information of the home authorities as to what, in his opinion, was the cause of the French railway strike, he had hit on the ingenious device of reporting what was the opinion of the greater part of the forces under his command. This was a dangerous line to take, for he might well come into conflict with the home Government. But he was pretty certain that any inquiries that the home Government could cause to be made amongst the local civilian population would confirm what he was writing—which he was careful to state was not to be taken as a communication of his own opinion. In addition, he did not care what the Government did to him.

He was satisfied with his military career. In the early

part of the war, after materially helping mobilisation, he had served with great distinction in the East, in command mostly of mounted infantry. He had subsequently so distinguished himself in the organising and transporting of troops coming and going overseas that, on the part of the lines of communication where he now commanded becoming of great importance, he knew that he had seemed the only general that could be given that command. It had become of enormous importance—these were open secrets!—because, owing to divided opinions in the Cabinet, it might at any moment be decided to move the bulk of H.M. Forces to somewhere in the East. The idea underlying this—as General Campion saw it—had at least some relation to the necessities of the British Empire, and strategy embracing world politics as well as military movements—a fact which is often forgotten. There was this much to be said for it: the preponderance of British Imperial interests might be advanced as lying in the Middle and Far East—to the east, that is to say, of Constantinople. This might be denied, but it was a feasible proposition. The present operations on the Western front, arduous, and even creditable, as they might have been until relatively lately, were very remote from our Far-Eastern possessions and mitigated from, rather than added to, our prestige. In addition, the unfortunate display in front of Constantinople in the beginning of the war had almost eliminated our prestige with the Mohammedan races. Thus a demonstration in enormous force in any region between European Turkey and the north-western frontiers of India might point out to Mohammedans, Hindus, and other Eastern races, what overwhelming forces Great Britain, were she so minded, could put into the field. It is true that that would mean the certain loss of the war on the Western front, with corresponding loss of prestige in the West. But the wiping out of the French republic would convey little to the Eastern races, whereas we could no doubt make terms with the enemy nations, as a price for abandoning our allies, that might well leave the Empire, not only intact, but actually

increased in colonial extent, since it was unlikely that the enemy empires would wish to be burdened with colonies for some time.

General Campion was not overpoweringly sentimental over the idea of the abandonment of our allies. They had won his respect as fighting organizations, and that, to the professional soldier, is a great deal; but still he *was* a professional soldier, and the prospect of widening the bounds of the British Empire could not be contemptuously dismissed at the price of rather sentimental dishonour. Such bargains had been struck before during wars involving many nations, and doubtless such bargains would be struck again. In addition, votes might be gained by the Government from the small but relatively noisy and menacing part of the British population that favoured the enemy nations.

But when it came to tactics—which it should be remembered concerns itself with the movement of troops actually in contact with enemy forces—General Campion had no doubt that that plan was the conception of the brain of a madman. The dishonour of such a proceeding must of course be considered—and its impracticability was hopeless. The dreadful nature of what would be our debacle did we attempt to evacuate the Western front might well be unknown to, or might be deliberately ignored by, the civilian mind. But the general could almost see the horrors as a picture—and, professional soldier as he was, his mind shuddered at the picture. They had by now in the country enormous bodies of troops who had hitherto not come into contact with the enemy forces. Did they attempt to withdraw these in the first place the native population would at once turn from a friendly into a bitterly hostile factor, and moving troops through hostile country is to the *n*th power a more lengthy matter than moving them through territory where the native populations lend a helping hand, or are at least not obstructive. They had in addition this enormous force to ration, and they would doubtless have to supply them with ammunition on the almost

certain breaking through of the enemy forces. It would be impossible to do this without the use of the local railways—and the use of these would at once be prohibited. If, on the other hand, they attempted to begin the evacuation by shortening the front, the operation would be very difficult with troops who, by now, were almost solely men trained only in trench warfare, with officers totally unused to that keeping up of communications between units which is the life and breath of a retreating army. Training, in fact, in that element had been almost abandoned in the training camps where instruction was almost limited to bomb-throwing, the use of machine-guns, and other departments which had been forced on the War Office by eloquent civilians—to the almost complete neglect of the rifle. Thus at the mere hint of a retreat the enemy forces must break through and come upon the vast, unorganised, or semi-organised bodies of troops in the rear. . . .

The temptation for the professional soldier was to regard such a state of things with equanimity. Generals have not infrequently enormously distinguished themselves by holding up retreats from the rear when vanguard commanders have disastrously failed. But General Campion resisted the temptation of even hoping that this chance of distinguishing himself might offer itself. He could not contemplate with equanimity the slaughter of great bodies of men under his command, and not even a successful retreating action of that description could be carried out without horrible slaughter. And he would have little hope of conducting necessarily delicate and very hurried movements with an army that, except for its rough training in trench warfare, was practically civilian in texture. So that although, naturally, he had made his plans for such an eventuality, having indeed in his private quarters four enormous paper-covered blackboards upon which he had changed daily the names of units according as they passed from his hands or came into them and became available, he prayed specifically every night before retiring to bed that the task might not be cast upon his shoulders. He prized very much his

universal popularity in his command, and he could not bear to think of how the eyes of the Army would regard him as he put upon them a strain so appalling and such unbearable sufferings. He had, moreover, put that aspect of the matter very strongly in a memorandum that he had prepared in answer to a request from the home Government for a scheme by which an evacuation might be effected. But he considered that the civilian element in the Government was so entirely indifferent to the sufferings of the men engaged in these operations, and was so completely ignorant of what are military exigencies, that the words he had devoted to that department of the subject were merely wasted. . . .

So everything pushed him into writing confidentially to the Secretary of State for War a communication that he knew must be singularly distasteful to a number of the gentlemen who would peruse it. He chuckled indeed as he wrote, the open door behind him and the sunlight pouring in on his radiant figure. He said:

'Sit down, Tietjens. Levin, I shall not want you for ten minutes,' without raising his head, and went on writing. It annoyed him that, from the corner of his eye, he could see that Tietjens was still standing, and he said rather irritably: 'Sit down, sit down. . . .'

He wrote:

'It is pretty generally held here by the native population that the present very serious derangement of traffic, if not actively promoted, is at least winked at by the Government of this country. It is, that is to say, intended to give us a taste of what would happen if I took any measures here for returning any large body of men to the home country or elsewhere, and it is said also to be a demonstration in favour of a single command—a measure which is here regarded by a great weight of instructed opinion as indispensable to the speedy and successful conclusion of hostilities. . . .'

The general paused over that sentence. It came very near the quick. For himself he was absolutely in favour of

a single command, and in his opinion, too, it was indispensable to any sort of conclusion of hostilities at all. The whole of military history, in so far as it concerned allied operations of any sort—from the campaigns of Xerxes and operations during the wars of the Greeks and Romans, to the campaigns of Marlborough and Napoleon and the Prussian operations of 1866 and 1870—pointed to the conclusion that a relatively small force acting homogeneously was, to the *n*th power again, more effective than vastly superior forces of allies acting only imperfectly in accord or not in accord at all. Modern development in arms had made no shade at all of difference to strategy and had made differences merely of time and numbers to tactics. To-day, as in the days of the Greek Wars of the Allies, success depended on apt timing of the arrival of forces at given points, and it made no difference whether your lethal weapons acted from a distance of thirty miles or were held and operated by hand; whether you dealt death from above or below the surface of the ground, through the air by dropped missiles or by mephitic and torturing vapours. What won combats, campaigns, and, in the end, wars, was the brain which timed the arrival of forces at given points—and that must be one brain which could command their presence at these points, not a half-dozen authorities requesting each other to perform operations which might or might not fall in with the ideas or the prejudices of any one or other of the half-dozen. . . .

Levin came in noiselessly, slid a memorandum slip on to the blanket beside the paper on which the general was writing. The general read: *T. agrees completely, sir, with your diagnosis of the facts, except that he is much more ready to accept General O'H.'s acts as reasonable. He places himself entirely in your hands.*

The general heaved an immense sigh of relief. The sunlight streaming in became very bright. He had had a real sinking at the heart when Tietjens had boggled for a second over putting on his belt. An officer may not

demand or insist on a court martial. But he, Campion, could not in decency have refused Tietjens his court martial if he stood out for it. He had a right to clear his character publicly. It would have been impossible to refuse him. Then the fat would have been in the fire. For, knowing O'Hara through pretty nearly twenty-five years—or it must be thirty!—of service Campion was pretty certain that O'Hara had made a drunken beast of himself. Yet he was very attached to O'Hara—one of the old type of rough-diamond generals who swore your head off, but were damn capable men! . . . It was a tremendous relief.

He said sharply:

'Sit down, can't you, Tietjens! You irritate me by standing there!' He said to himself: 'An obstinate fellow. . . . Why, he's gone!' and his mind and eyes being occupied by the sentence he had last written, the sense of irritation remained with him. He re-read the closing clause: '... a single command—a measure which is here regarded by a great weight of instructed opinion as indispensable to the speedy and successful termination of hostilities. . . .'

He looked at this, whistling beneath his breath. It was pretty thick. He was not asked for his opinion as to the single command: yet he decidedly wanted to get it in and was pretty well prepared to stand the consequences. The consequences might be something pretty bad: he might be sent home. That was quite possible. That, even, was better than what was happening to poor Puffles, who was being starved of men. He had been at Sandhurst with Puffles, and they had got their commissions on the same day to the same regiment. A damn good soldier, but too hot-tempered. He was making an extraordinarily good thing of it in spite of his shortage of men, which was the talk of the army. But it must be damn agonizing for him, and a very improper strain on his men. One day—as soon as the weather broke—the enemy *must* break through. Then he, Puffles, would be sent home. That was what the fellows at Westminster and in Downing Street wanted. Puffles had been a great deal too free with his tongue. They would not

send him home before he had a disaster because, unless he were in disgrace, he would be a thorn in their sides: whereas if he were disgraced no one much would listen to him. It was smart practice. . . . *Sharp* practice!

He tossed the sheet on which he had been writing across the table and said to Tietjens:

'Look at that, will you?' In the centre of the hut Tietjens was sitting bulkily on a bully-beef case that had been brought in ceremoniously by a runner. 'He *does* look beastly shabby,' the general said. 'There are three . . . four grease stains on his tunic. He ought to get his hair cut!' He added: 'It's a perfectly damnable business. No one but this fellow would have got into it. He's a firebrand. That's what he is. A regular firebrand!'

Tietjens' troubles had really shaken the general not a little. He was left up in the air. He had lived the greater part of his life with his sister, Lady Claudine Sandbach, and the greater part of the remainder of his life at Groby, at any rate after he came home from India and during the reign of Tietjens' father. He had idolized Tietjens' mother, who was a saint! What indeed there had been of the idyllic in his life had really all passed at Groby, if he came to think of it. India was not so bad, but one had to be young to enjoy that. . . .

Indeed, only the day before yesterday he had been thinking that if this letter that he was thinking out did result in his being sent back, he should propose to stand for the half of the Cleveland Parliamentary Division in which Groby stood. What with the Groby influence and his nephew's in the country districts, though Castlemaine had not much land left up there, and with Sandbach's interest in the ironworking districts, he would have an admirable chance of getting in. Then he would make himself a thorn in the side of certain persons.

He had thought of quartering himself on Groby. It would have been easy to get Tietjens out of the army and they could all—he, Tietjens and Sylvia—live together. It

would have been his ideal of a home and of an occupation. . . .

For, of course, he was getting old for soldiering: unless he got a fighting army there was not much more to it as a career for a man of sixty. If he *did* get an army he was pretty certain of a peerage and hefty political work could still be done in the Lords. He would have a good claim on India and that meant dying a Field-Marshal.

On the other hand, the only command that was at all likely to be going—except for deaths, and the health rate amongst army commanders was pretty high!—was poor Puffles'. And that would be no pleasant command—with men all hammered to pieces. He decided to put the whole thing to Tietjens. Tietjens, like a meal-sack, was looking at him over the draft of the letter that he had just finished reading. The general said:

'Well?'

Tietjens said:

'It's splendid, sir, to see you putting the matter so strongly. It must be put strongly, or we're lost.'

The general said:

'You think that?'

Tietjens said:

'I'm sure of it, sir. . . . But unless you are prepared to throw up your command and take to politics. . . .'

The general exclaimed:

'You're a most extraordinary fellow. . . . That was exactly what I was thinking about: this very minute.'

'It's not so extraordinary,' Tietjens said. 'A really active general thinking as you do is very badly needed in the House. As your brother-in-law is to have a peerage whenever he asks for it, West Cleveland will be vacant at any moment, and with his influence and Lord Castlemaine's—your nephew's not got much land, but the name is immensely respected in the country districts. . . . And, of course, using Groby for your headquarters. . . .'

The general said:

'That's pretty well botched, isn't it?'

Tietjens said without moving a muscle:

'Why, no, sir. Sylvia is to have Groby and you would naturally make it your headquarters. . . . You've still got your hunters there. . . .'

The general said:

'Sylvia is really to have Groby. . . . Good God!'

Tietjens said:

'So it was no great conjuring trick, sir, to see that you might not mind. . . .'

The general said:

'Upon my soul. I'd as soon give up my chance of heaven . . . no, not heaven, but India, as give up Groby.'

'You've got,' Tietjens said, 'an admirable chance of India. . . . The point is: which way? If they give you the sixteenth section. . . .'

'I hate,' the general said, 'to think of waiting for poor Puffles' shoes. I was at Sandhurst with him. . . .'

'It's a question, sir,' Tietjens said, 'of which is the best way. For the country and yourself. I suppose if one were a general one would like to have commanded an army on the Western front. . . .'

The general said:

'I don't know. . . . It's the logical end of a career. . . . But I don't feel that my career is ending. . . . I'm as sound as a roach. And in ten years' time what difference will it make?'

'One would like,' Tietjens said, 'to see you doing it. . . .'

The general said:

'No one will know whether I commanded a fighting army or this damned Whiteley's outfitting store. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'I know that, sir. . . . But the sixteenth section will desperately need a good man if General Perry is sent home. And particularly a general who has the confidence of all ranks. . . . It will be a wonderful position. You will have every man that's now on the Western front at your back after the war. It's a certain peerage. . . . It's certainly a

sounder proposition than that of a free-lance—which is what you'd be—in the House of Commons.'

The general said:

'Then what am I to do with my letter? It's a damn good letter. I don't like wasting letters.'

Tietjens said:

'You want it to show through that you back the single command for all you are worth, yet you don't want them to put their finger on your definitely saying so yourself?'

The general said:

'... That's it. That's just what I do want. ...' He added: 'I suppose you take my view of the whole matter. The Government's pretence of evacuating the Western front in favour of the Middle East is probably only a put-up job to frighten our Allies into giving up the single command. Just as this railway strike is a counter-demonstration by way of showing what would happen to us if we did begin to evacuate. ...'

Tietjens said:

'It looks like that. ... I'm not, of course, in the confidence of the Cabinet. I'm not even in contact with them as I used to be. ... But I should put it that the section of the Cabinet that is in favour of the Eastern expedition is very small. It's said to be a one-man party—with hangers-on—but arguing him out of it has caused all this delay. That's how I see it.'

The general exclaimed:

'But, good God! ... How is such a thing possible? That man must walk along his corridors with the blood of a million—I mean it, of a million—men round his head. He could not stand up under it. ... That fellow is prolonging the war indefinitely by delaying us now. And men being killed all the time! ... I can't. ...' He stood up and paced, stamping up and down the hut. ... 'At Bonderstrom,' he said, 'I had half a company wiped out under me. ... By my own fault, I admit. I had wrong information ...' He stopped and said: 'Good God! ... Good God! ... I can see it now. ... And it's unbearable! After eighteen

years. I was a brigadier then. It was your own regiment—the Glamorganshires. . . . They were crowded into a little nullah and shelled to extinction. . . . I could see it going on and we could not get on to the Boer guns with ours to stop 'em. . . . That's hell,' he said, 'that's the real hell. . . . I never inspected the Glamorganshires after that for the whole war. I could not bear the thought of facing their eyes. . . . Buller was the same. . . . Buller was worse than I. . . . He never held up his head again after . . .'

Tietjens said:

'If you would not mind, sir, not going on . . .'

The general stamped to a halt in his stride. He said:

'Eh? . . . What's that? What's the matter with you?'

Tietjens said:

'I had a man killed on me last night. In this very hut; where I'm sitting is the exact spot. It makes me. . . . It's a sort of . . . Complex, they call it now. . . .'

The general exclaimed:

'Good God! I beg your pardon, my dear boy. . . . I ought not to have. . . . I have never behaved like that before another soul in the world. . . . Not to Buller. . . . Not to Gatacre, and they were my closest friends. . . . Even after Spion Kop I never. . . .' He broke off and said: 'I've such an absolute belief in your trustworthiness, I *know* you won't betray what you've seen. . . . What I've just said. . . .' He paused and tried to adopt the air of the listening magpie. He said: 'I was called Butcher Champion in South Africa, just as Gatacre was called Backacher. I don't want to be called anything else because I've made an ass of myself before you. . . . No, damn it all, not an ass. I was immensely attached to your sainted mother. . . .' He said: 'It's the proudest tribute any commander of men can have. . . . To be called Butcher and have your men follow you in spite of it. It shows confidence, and it gives you, as commander, confidence! . . . One has to be prepared to lose men in hundreds at the right minute in order to avoid losing them in tens of thousands at the wrong! . . .' He said: 'Successful military operations consist not in taking

or retaining positions, but in taking or retaining them with a minimum sacrifice of effectives. . . . I wish to God you civilians would get that into your heads. The men have it. They know that I will use them ruthlessly—but that I will not waste one life. . . .’ He exclaimed: ‘Damn it, if I had ever thought I should have such troubles, in your father’s days . . . !’ He said: ‘Let’s get back to what we were talking about. . . . My memorandum to the Secretary. . . .’ He burst out: ‘My God! . . . *What* can that fellow think when he reads Shakespeare’s *When all those heads, legs, arms, joined together on the Last Day shall . . .* How does it run? Henry V’s address to his soldiers . . . *Every subject’s body is the king’s . . . but every subject’s soul is his own. . . . And there is no king, be his cause ever so just. . . .* My God! My God! . . . *as can try it out with all unspotted soldiers. . . .* Have you ever thought of that?’

Alarm overcame Tietjens. The general was certainly in disorder. But over what? There was not time to think. Campion was certainly dreadfully overworked. . . . He exclaimed:

‘Sir, hadn’t you better? . . .’ He said: ‘If we could get back to your memorandum . . . I am quite prepared to write a report to the effect of your sentence as to the French civilian population’s attitude. That would throw the onus on me. . . .’

The general said agitatedly:

‘No! No! . . . You’ve got quite enough on your back as it is. Your confidential report states that you are suspected of having too great common interests with the French. That’s what makes the whole position so impossible. . . . I’ll get Thurston to write something. He’s a good man, Thurston. Reliable. . . .’ Tietjens shuddered a little. The general went on astonishingly:

‘But at my back I always hear
Time’s winged chariot hurrying near:
And yonder all before me lie
Deserts of vast eternity!’ . . .

That's a general's life in this accursed war. . . . You think all generals are illiterate fools. But I have spent a great deal of time in reading, though I never read anything written later than the seventeenth century.'

Tietjens said:

'I know, sir. . . . You made me read Clarendon's *History of the Great Rebellion* when I was twelve.'

The general said:

'In case we. . . I shouldn't like. . . In short. . . ' He swallowed: it was singular to see him swallow. He was lamentably thin when you looked at the man and not the uniform.

Tietjens thought:

'What's he nervous about? He's been nervous all the morning.'

The general said:

'I am trying to say—it's not much in my line—that in case we never met again, I do not wish you to think me an ignoramus.'

Tietjens thought:

'He's not ill. . . and he can't think me so ill that I'm likely to die. . . . A fellow like that doesn't really know how to express himself. He's trying to be kind and he doesn't know how to. . . .'

The general had paused. He began to say:

'But there are finer things in Marvell than that. . . .'

Tietjens thought:

'He's trying to gain time. . . . Why on earth should he? . . . What is this all about?' His mind slipped a notch. The general was looking at his finger-nails on the blanket. He said:

'There's, for instance:

'The grave's a fine and secret place
But none I think do there embrace. . . .'

At those words it came to Tietjens suddenly to think of Sylvia, with the merest film of clothing on her long, shining limbs. . . . She was working a powder-puff under her arm-

pits in a brilliant illumination from two electric lights, one on each side of her dressing table. She was looking at him in the glass with the corners of her lips just moving. A little curled. . . . He said to himself:

'One is going to that fine and secret place. . . . Why not have?' She had emanated a perfume founded on sandalwood. As she worked her swansdown powder-puff over those intimate regions he could hear her humming. Maliciously! It was then that he had observed the handle of the door moving minutely. She had incredible arms, stretched out amongst a wilderness of besilvered cosmetics. Extraordinarily lascivious! Yet clean! Her gilded sheath gown was about her hips on the chair. . . .

Well! she had pulled the strings of one too many shower-baths!

Shining; radiating glory but still shrivelled so that he reminded Tietjens of an old apple inside a damascened helmet; the general had seated himself once more on the bulky-beef case before the blanketed table. He fingered his very large, golden fountain-pen. He said:

'Captain Tietjens, I should be glad of your careful attention!'

Tietjens said:

'Sir!' His heart stopped.

The general said that that afternoon Tietjens would receive a movement order. He said stiffly that he must not regard this new movement order as a disgrace. It was promotion. He, Major-General Campion, was requesting the colonel commanding the depot to inscribe the highest possible testimonial in his, Tietjens', small-book. He, Tietjens, had exhibited the most extraordinary talent for finding solutions for difficult problems—The colonel was to write that!—In addition he, General Campion, was requesting his friend, General Perry, commanding the sixteenth section. . . .

Tietjens thought:

'Good God. I am being sent up the line. He's sending me to Perry's Army. . . . That's certain death!'

... To give Tietjens the appointment of second in command of the VIth Battalion of his regiment!

Tietjens said, but he did not know where the words came from:

'Colonel Partridge will not like that. He's praying for McKechnie to come back!'

To himself he said:

'I shall fight this monstrous treatment of myself to my last breath.'

The general suddenly called out:

'There you are.... There is another of your infernal worries....'

He put a strong check on himself, and, dryly, like the very great speaking to the very unimportant, asked:

'What's your medical category.'

Tietjens said:

'Permanent base, sir. My chest's rotten!'

The general said:

'I should forget that, if I were you.... The second in command of a battalion has nothing to do but sit about in arm-chairs waiting for the colonel to be killed.' He added: 'It's the best I can do for you.... I've thought it out very carefully. It's the best I can do for you.'

Tietjens said:

'I shall, of course, forget my category, sir....'

Of course he would never fight any treatment of himself!

There it was then: the natural catastrophe! As when, under thunder, a dam breaks. His mind was battling with the waters. What would it pick out as the main terror? The mud: the noise: dread always at the back of the mind? Or the worry! The worry! Your eyebrows always had a slight tension on them.... Like eye-strain!

The general had begun, soberly:

'You will recognize that there is nothing else that I can do.'

His answering:

'I recognize, naturally, sir, that there is nothing else that you can do....' seemed rather to irritate the general. He

wanted opposition: he *wanted* Tietjens to argue the matter. He was the Roman father counselling suicide to his son: but he wanted Tietjens to expostulate. So that he, General Campion, might absolutely prove that he, Tietjens, was a disgraceful individual. . . . It could not be done. The general said:

'You will understand that I can't—no commander could!—have such things happening in my command. . . .'

'I must accept that, if you say it, sir.'

The general looked at him under his eyebrows. He said:

'I have already told you that this is promotion. I have been much impressed by the way you have handled this command. You are, of course, no soldier, but you will make an admirable officer for the militia, that is all that our troops now are. . . .' He said: 'I will emphasize what I am saying. . . . No officer could—without being militarily in the wrong—have a private life that is as incomprehensible and embarrassing as yours. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'He's hit it! . . .'

The general said:

'An officer's private life and his life on parade are as strategy to tactics. . . . I don't want, if I can avoid it, to go into your private affairs. It's extremely embarrassing. . . . But let me put it to you that . . . I wish to be delicate. But you are a man of the world! . . . Your wife is an extremely beautiful woman. . . . There has been a scandal . . . I admit not of your making. . . . But if, on the top of that, I appeared to show favouritism to you . . .'

Tietjens said:

'You need not go on, sir. . . . I understand. . . .' He tried to remember what the brooding and odious McKechnie had said . . . only two nights ago. . . . He couldn't remember. . . . It was certainly a suggestion that Sylvia was the general's mistress. It had then, he remembered, seemed fantastic. . . . Well, what else *could* they think? He said to himself: 'It absolutely blocks out my staying here!' He said aloud: 'Of course, it's my own fault. If a man so handles

his womenfolk that they get out of hand, he has only himself to blame.'

The general was going on. He pointed out that one of his predecessors had lost that very command on account of scandals about women. He had turned the place into a damned harem! . . .

He burst out, looking at Tietjens with a peculiar goggle-eyed intentness:

'If you think I'd care about losing my command over Sylvia or any other damned Society woman. . . .' He said: 'I beg your pardon . . .' and continued reasoningly:

'It's the men that have to be considered. They think—and they've every right to think it if they wish to—that a man who's a wrong 'un over women isn't the man they can trust their lives in the hands of. . . .' He added: 'And they're probably right. . . . A man who's a real wrong 'un. . . . I don't mean who sets up a gal in a tea-shop. . . . But one who sells his wife, or . . . At any rate, in *our* army. . . . The French may be different! . . . Well, a man like that usually has a yellow streak when it comes to fighting. . . . Mind, I'm not saying always. . . . Usually. . . . There was a fellow called. . . .'

He went off into an anecdote. . . .

Tietjens recognized the pathos of his trying to get away from the agonizing present moment, back to an India where it was all real soldiering and good leather and parades that had been parades. But he did not feel called upon to follow. He could not follow. He was going up the line. . . .

He occupied himself with his mind. What was it going to do? He cast back along his military history: what had his mind done in similar moments before? . . . But there had never been a similar moment! There had been the sinister or repulsive business of going up, getting over, standing to—even of the casualty clearing-station! . . . But he had always been physically keener, he had never been so depressed or overwhelmed.

He said to the general:

'I recognize that I cannot stop in this command. I regret it, for I have enjoyed having this unit. . . . But does it necessarily mean the VIth Battalion?'

He wondered what was his own motive at the moment. Why had he asked the general that? . . . The thing presented itself as pictures: getting down bulkily from a high French train, at dawn. The light picked out for you the white of large hunks of bread—half-loaves—being handed out to troops themselves invisible. . . . The ovals of light on the hats of English troops: they were mostly West Countrymen. They did not seem to want the bread much. . . . A long ridge of light above a wooded bank: then suddenly, pervasively, a sound! . . . For all the world as, sheltering from rain in a cottager's wash-house on the moors, you hear the cottager's clothes boiling in a copper . . . Bubble . . . bubble . . . bubbubub . . . bubble . . . Not terribly loud—but terribly demanding attention! . . . The Great Strafe! . . .

The general had said:

'If I could think of anything else to do with you, I'd do it. . . . But all the extraordinary rows you've got into. . . . They block me everywhere. . . . Do you realize that I have requested General O'Hara to suspend his functions until now? . . .'

It was amazing to Tietjens how the general mistrusted his subordinates—as well as how he trusted them! . . . It was probably that that made him so successful an officer. Be worked for by men that you trust: but distrust them all the time—along certain lines of frailty: liquor, women, money! . . . Well, he had a long knowledge of men!

He said:

'I admit, sir, that I misjudged General O'Hara. I have said as much to Colonel Levin and explained why.'

The general said with a gloating irony:

'A damn pretty pass to come to. . . . You put a general officer under arrest. . . . Then you say you had misjudged him! . . . I am not saying you were not performing a duty . . .'

He went on to recount the classical case of a subaltern,

cited in King's Regulations, temp. William IV, who was court-martialled and broken for not putting under arrest his colonel who came drunk on to parade. . . . He was exhibiting his sensuous delight in misplaced erudition.

Tietjens heard himself say with great slowness:

'I absolutely deny, sir, that I put General O'Hara under arrest! I have gone into the matter very minutely with Colonel Levin.'

The general burst out:

'By God! I had taken that woman to be a saint. . . . I swear she is a saint. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'There is no accusation against Mrs Tietjens, sir!'

The general said:

'By God, there is!'

Tietjens said:

'I am prepared to take all the blame, sir.'

The general said:

'You shan't. . . . I am determined to get to the bottom of all this. . . . You have treated your wife damn badly. . . . You admit to that. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'With great want of consideration, sir. . . .'

The general said:

'You have been living practically on terms of separation from her for a number of years? You don't deny that that was on account of your own misbehaviour. For how many years?'

Tietjens said:

'I don't know, sir. . . . Six or seven!'

The general said sharply:

'Think, then. . . . It began when you admitted to me that you had been sold up because you kept a girl in a tobacco-shop? That was at Rye in 1912. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'We have not been on terms since 1912, sir.'

The general said:

'But why? . . . She's a most beautiful woman. She's

adorable. What could you want better? . . . She's the mother of your child. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'Is it necessary to go into all this, sir? . . . Our differences were caused by . . . by differences of temperament. She, as you say, is a beautiful and reckless woman. . . . Reckless in an admirable way. I, on the other hand . . .'

The general exclaimed:

'Yes! that's just it. . . . What the hell are you? . . . You're not a soldier. You've got the makings of a damn good soldier. You amaze me at times. Yet you're a disaster; you are a disaster to every one who has to do with you. You are as conceited as a hog; you are as obstinate as a bullock. . . . You drive me mad. . . . And you have ruined the life of that beautiful woman. . . . For I maintain she once had the disposition of a saint. . . . Now: I'm waiting for your explanation!'

Tietjens said:

'In civilian life, sir, I was a statistician. Second secretary to the Department of Statistics. . . .'

The general exclaimed convictingly:

'And they've thrown you out of that! Because of the mysterious rows you made. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'Because, sir, I was in favour of the single command. . . .'

The general began a long wrangle: 'But why were you? What the hell had it got to do with you?' Couldn't Tietjens have given the Department the statistics they wanted—even if it meant faking them? What was discipline for if subordinates were to act on their consciences? The home Government had wanted statistics faked in order to dish the Allies. . . . Well . . . Was Tietjens French or English? Every damn thing Tietjens did . . . Every *damn* thing, made it more impossible to do anything for him! With his attainments he ought to be attached to the staff of the French Commander-in-Chief. But that was forbidden in his, Tietjens', confidential report. There was an underlined note in it to that effect. Where else, then, in Heaven's

name, could Tietjens be sent to? He looked at Tietjens with intent blue eyes:

'Where else, in God's name... I am not using the Almighty's name blasphemously... *can* you be sent to? I *know* it's probably death to send you up the line—in your condition of health. And to poor Perry's Army. The Germans will be through it the minute the weather breaks.'

He began again: 'You understand: I'm not the War Office. I can't send any officer anywhere. I can't send you to Malta or India. Or to other commands in France. I can send you home—in disgrace. I can send you to your own battalion. On promotion! ... Do you understand my situation? ... I have no alternative.'

Tietjens said:

'Not altogether, sir.'

The general swallowed and wavered from side to side. He said:

'For God's sake, try to.... I am genuinely concerned for you. I won't—I'm damned if I will!—let it appear that you're disgraced.... If you were McKechnie himself I wouldn't! The only really good jobs I've got to give away are on my own staff. I can't have you there. Because of the men. At the same time...'

He paused and said with a ponderous shyness:

'I believe there's a God.... I believe that, though wrong may flourish, right will triumph in the end! ... If a man is innocent, his innocence will one day appear.... In a humble way I want to ... help Providence.... I want some one to be able one day to say: "*General Champion, who knew the ins and outs of the affair...*" promoted you! In the middle of it....' He said: 'It isn't much. But it's not nepotism. I would do as much for any man in your position.'

Tietjens said:

'It's at least the act of a Christian gentleman!'

A certain lack-lustre joy appeared in the general's eyes. He said:

'I'm not used to this sort of situation.... I hope I've

always tried to help my junior officers. . . . But a case like this. . . .’ He said:

‘Damn it. . . . The general commanding the 9th French Army is an intimate friend of mine. . . . But in face of your confidential report—I *can’t* ask him to ask for you. That’s blocked!’

Tietjens said:

‘I do not propose, sir, at any rate in your eyes, to pass as putting the interests of any power before those of my own country. If you examine my confidential report you will find that the unfavourable insertions are initialled G. D. . . . They are the initials of a Major Drake. . . .’

The general said bewilderingly:

‘Drake . . . Drake . . . I’ve heard the name.’

Tietjens said:

‘It doesn’t matter, sir. . . . Major Drake’s a gentleman who doesn’t like me. . . .’

The general said:

‘There are so many. You don’t try to make yourself popular, I must say!’

Tietjens said to himself:

‘The old fellow feels it! . . . But he can hardly expect me to tell him that Sylvia thinks Drake was the father of my own son, and desires my ruin!’ But of course the old man *would* feel it. He, Tietjens, and his wife, Sylvia, were as near a son and daughter as the old man had. The obvious answer to make to the old man’s query as to where he, Tietjens, ought to be sent was to remind him that his brother Mark had had an order put through to the effect that Tietjens was to be put in command of divisional transport. . . . *Could* he remind the old man of that? Was it a thing one could do?

Yet the idea of commanding divisional transport was like a vision of Paradise to Tietjens. For two reasons: it was relatively safe, being concerned with a lot of horses . . . and the knowledge that he had that employment would put Valentine Wannop’s mind at rest.

Paradise! . . . But *could* one wangle out of a hard into

a soft job? Some other poor devil very likely wanted it. On the other hand—think of Valentine Wannop! He imagined her torture of mind, wandering about London, thinking of him in the very worst spot of a doomed army. She would get to hear of that. Sylvia would tell her! He would bet Sylvia would ring her up and tell her. Imagine, then, writing to Mark to say that he was with the transport! Mark would pass it on to the girl within half a minute. Why . . . he, Tietjens, would wire. He imagined himself scribbling the wire while the general talked and giving it to an orderly the moment the talk was over. . . . But *could* he put the idea into the old man's head! *Is* it done? . . . Would, say . . . say, an Anglican saint do it?

And then . . . Was he up to the job? What about the accursed obsession of O Nine Morgan that intermittently jumped on him? All the while he had been riding Schomburg the day before, O Nine Morgan had seemed to be just before the coffin-headed brute's off-shoulder. The animal must fall! . . . He had had the passionate impulse to pull up the horse. And all the time a dreadful depression! A weight! In the hotel last night he had nearly fainted over the thought that Morgan might have been the man whose life he had spared at Noircourt. . . . It was getting to be a serious matter! It might mean that there was a crack in his, Tietjens', brain. A lesion! If that was to go on . . . O Nine Morgan, dirty as he always was, and with the mystified eyes of the subject races on his face, rising up before his horse's off-shoulder! But alive, not with half his head cut away. . . . If that was to go on he would not be fit to deal with transport, which meant a great deal of riding.

But he would chance that. . . . Besides, some damn fool of a literary civilian had been writing passionate letters to the papers insisting that all horses and mules must be abolished in the army. . . . Because of their pestilence-spreading dung! . . . It might be decreed by A.C.I. that no more horses were to be used! . . . Imagine taking battalion supplies down by night with motor lorries, which was what that genius desired to see done! . . .

He remembered once or twice—it must have been in September, '16—having had the job of taking battalion transport down from Lochre to B.H.Q., which were in the château of Kemmell village. . . . You muffled every bit of metal you could think of: bits, trace-chains, axles . . . and yet, whilst you hardly breathed, in the thick darkness some damn thing would always chink and jolt; beef tins made a noise of old iron. . . . And *bang*, after a long whine, would come the German shell, registered exactly on to the corner of the road where it went down by the shoulder of the hill: where the placards were ordering you not to go more than two men together. . . . Imagine doing it with lorries, that could be heard five miles away! . . . The battalion would go pretty short of rations! . . . The same anti-chevaline genius had emitted the sentiment that he had rather the Allies lost the war than that cavalry should distinguish themselves in any engagement! . . . A wonderful passion for the extermination of dung . . . ! Or perhaps this hatred of the horse was social. . . . Because the cavalry wear long moustaches dripping with Macassar oil and breakfast off caviare, chocolate and Pommery Greno they must be abolished! . . . Something like that. . . . He exclaimed: 'By God! How my mind wanders! How long will it go on?' He said: 'I am at the end of my tether.' He had missed what the general had said for some time.

The general said:

'Well. Has he?'

Tietjens said:

'I didn't catch, sir!'

'Are you deaf?' the general asked. 'I'm sure I speak plain enough. You've just said there are no horses attached to this camp. I asked you if there is not a horse for the colonel commanding the depot. . . . A German horse, I understand!'

Tietjens said to himself:

'Great heavens! I've been talking to him. What in the world about?' It was as if his mind were falling off a hillside. He said:

'Yes, sir . . . Schomburg. But as that's a German prisoner, captured on the Marne, it is not on our strength. It is the private property of the colonel. I ride it myself. . . .'

The general exclaimed dryly:

'You *would*. . . .' He added more dryly still: 'Are you aware that there is a hell of a strafe put in against you by a R.A.S.C. second-lieutenant called Hotchkiss? . . .'

Tietjens said quickly:

'If it's over Schomburg, sir . . . it's a washout. Lieutenant Hotchkiss has no more right to give orders about him than as to where I shall sleep. . . . And I would rather die than subject any horse for which I am responsible to the damnable torture Hotchkiss and that swine Lord Beichan want to inflict on service horses. . . .'

The general said malefically:

'It looks as if you damn well will die on that account!'

He added: 'You're perfectly right to object to wrong treatment of horses. But in this case your objection blocks the only other job open to you.' He quietened himself a little. 'You are probably not aware,' he went on, 'that your brother Mark . . .'

Tietjens said:

'Yes, I am aware . . .'

The general said: 'Do you know that the 19th Division to which your brother wants you sent is attached to Fourth Army now—and it's Fourth Army horses that Hotchkiss is to play with? . . . How could I send you there to be under his orders?'

Tietjens said:

'That's perfectly correct, sir. There is nothing else that you can do. . . .' He was finished. There was now nothing left but to find out how his mind was going to take it. He wished they could go to his cook-houses!

The general said:

'What was I saying? . . . I'm dreadfully tired. . . . No one could stand this. . . .' He drew from inside his tunic a lapis-lazuli coloured, small be-coroneted note-case and selected from it a folded paper that he first looked at and then

slipped between his belt and his tunic. He said: 'On top of all the responsibility I have to bear!' He asked: 'Has it occurred to you that, if I'm of any service to the country, your taking up my energy—*sapping* my energy over your affairs!—is aiding your country's enemies? . . . I can only afford four hours sleep as it is. . . . I've got some questions to ask you. . . .' He referred to the slip of paper from his belt, folded it again and again slipped it into his belt.

Tietjens' mind missed a notch again. . . . It *was* the fear of the mud that was going to obsess him. Yet, curiously, he had never been under heavy fire in mud. . . . You would think that that would not have obsessed him. But in his ear he had just heard uttered in a whisper of intense weariness, the words: *Es ist nicht zu ertragen; es ist das dasz uns verloren hat* . . . words in German, of utter despair, meaning: It is unbearable: it is that that has ruined us. . . . The mud! . . . He had heard those words, standing amidst volcano craters of mud, amongst ravines, monstrosities of slime, cliffs and distances, all of slime. . . . He had been going, for curiosity or instruction, from Verdun where he had been attached to the French—on a holiday afternoon when nothing was doing, with a guide, to visit one of the outlying forts. . . . Deaumont? . . . No, Douaumont. . . . Taken from the enemy about a week before. . . . When would that be? He had lost all sense of chronology. . . . In November. . . . A beginning of some November. . . . With a miracle of sunshine: not a cloud: the mud towering up shut you in intimately with a sky that ached for limpidity. . . . And the slime had moved . . . following a French bombardier who was strolling along eating nuts, disreputably, his shoulders rolling. . . . *Déserteurs*. . . . The moving slime was German deserters. . . . You could not see them: the leader of them—an officer!—had his glasses so thick with mud that you could not see the colour of his eyes, and his half-dozen decorations were like the beginnings of swallows' nests, his beard like stalactites. . . . Of the other men you could only see the eyes—extraordinarily vivid: mostly blue like the sky! . . . Deserters! Led by an officer! Of

the Hamburg Regiment! As if an officer of the Buffs had gone over!... It was incredible.... And that was what the officer had said as he passed: not shamefacedly, but without any humanity left in him... *Done!*... Those moving saurians compacted of slime kept on passing him afterwards, all the afternoon.... And he could not help picturing their immediate antecedents for two months.... In advanced pill-boxes.... No, they didn't have pill-boxes then.... In advanced pockets of mud, in dreadful solitude amongst those ravines.... suspended in eternity, at the last day of the world. And it had horribly shocked him to hear again the German language, a rather soft voice, a little suety.... Like an obscene whisper.... The voice obviously of the damned: hell could hold nothing curious for those poor beasts.... His French guide had said sardonically: *On dirait l'Inferno de Dante!*... Well, those Germans were getting back on him. They were now to become an obsession! A complex, they said nowadays.... The general said coolly:

'I presume you refuse to answer?'

That shook him cruelly.

He said desperately:

'I had to end what I took to be an unbearable position for both parties. In the interests of my son!' Why in the world had he said that?... He was going to be sick. It came back to him that the general had been talking of his separation from Sylvia. Last night that had happened. He said: 'I may have been right: I may have been wrong....'

The general said icily:

'If you don't choose to go into it....'

Tietjens said:

'I would prefer not to....'

The general said:

'There is no end to this.... But there are questions it's my duty to ask.... If you do not wish to go into your marital relations, I cannot force you.... But, damn it, are you sane? Are you responsible? Do you intend to get Miss

Wannop to live with you before the war is over? Is she, perhaps, here, in the town, now? Is that your reason for separating from Sylvia? Now, of all times in the world!’

Tietjens said:

‘No, sir. I ask you to believe that I have absolutely no relations with that young lady. None! I have no intention of having any. None!...’

The general said:

‘I believe that!’

‘Circumstances last night,’ Tietjens said, ‘convinced me suddenly, there on the spot, that I had been wronging my wife. . . . I had been putting a strain on the lady that was unwarrantable. It humiliates me to have to say it! I had taken a certain course for the sake of the future of our child. But it was an atrociously wrong course. We ought to have separated years ago. It has led to the lady’s pulling the strings of all these shower-baths. . . .’

The general said:

‘Pulling the . . .’

Tietjens said :

‘It expresses it, sir. . . . Last night was nothing but pulling the string of a shower-bath. Perfectly justifiable. I maintain that it was perfectly justifiable.’

The general said:

‘Then why have you given her Groby? . . . You’re not a little soft, are you? . . . You don’t imagine you’ve . . . say, got a mission? Or that you’re another person? . . . That you have to . . . to forgive. . . .’ He took off his pretty hat and wiped his forehead with a tiny cambric handkerchief. He said: ‘Your poor mother was a little . . .’

He said suddenly:

‘To-night when you are coming to my dinner . . . I hope you’ll be decent. Why do you so neglect your personal appearance? Your tunic is a disgusting spectacle. . . .’

Tietjens said:

‘I had a better tunic, sir . . . but it has been ruined by the blood of the man who was killed here last night. . . .’

The general said:

'You don't say you have only two tunics?... Have you no mess clothes?'

Tietjens said:

'Yes, sir, I've my blue things. I shall be all right for to-night. . . . But almost everything else I possessed was stolen from my kit when I was in hospital. . . . Even Sylvia's two pair of sheets. . . .'

'But hang it all,' the general exclaimed, 'you don't mean to say you've spaffled all your father left you?'

Tietjens said:

'I thought fit to refuse what my father left me owing to the way it was left. . . .'

The general said:

'But, good God! . . . Read that!' He tossed the small sheet of paper at which he had been looking across the table. It fell face downwards. Tietjens read, in the minute handwriting of the general's:

'Colonel's horse: Sheets: Jesus Christ: Wannop girl: Socialism?'

The general said irritably:

'The other side . . . the other side. . . .'

The other side of the paper displayed the words in large capitals: WORKERS OF THE WORLD, a wood-cut of a sickle and some other objects. Then high treason for a page.

The general said:

'Have you ever seen anything like that before? Do you know what it is?'

Tietjens answered:

'Yes, sir. I sent that to you. To your Intelligence. . . .'

The general thumped both his fists violently on the army blanket:

'You . . .' he said. 'It's incomprehensible. . . . It's incredible. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'No, sir. . . . You sent out an order asking commanders of units to ascertain what attempts were being made by Socialists to undermine the discipline of their other ranks.

... I naturally asked my sergeant-major, and he produced this sheet, which one of the men had given to him as a curiosity. It had been handed to the man in the street in London. You can see my initials on the top of the sheet!’

The general said:

‘You... you’ll excuse me, but you’re not a Socialist yourself?’

Tietjens said:

‘I knew you were working round to that, sir. But I’ve no politics that did not disappear in the eighteenth century. You, sir, prefer the seventeenth!’

‘Another shower-bath, I suppose,’ the general said.

‘Of course,’ Tietjens said, ‘if it’s Sylvia that called me a Socialist, it’s not astonishing. I’m a Tory of such an extinct type that she might take me for anything. The last megatherium. She’s absolutely to be excused. ...’

The general was not listening. He said:

‘What was wrong with the way your father left his money to you?’

‘My father,’ Tietjens said—the general saw his jaw stiffen—‘committed suicide because a fellow called Ruggles told him that I was ... what the French called *maquereau* ... I can’t think of the English word. My father’s suicide was not an act that can be condoned. A gentleman does not commit suicide when he has descendants. It might influence my boy’s life very disastrously. ...’

The general said:

‘I can’t... I *can’t* get to the bottom of all this. ... What in the world did Ruggles want to go and tell your father that for?... What are you going to do for a living after the war? They won’t take you back into your office, will they?’

Tietjens said:

‘No, sir. The Department will not take me back. Every one who has served in this war will be a marked man for a long time after it is over. That’s proper enough. *We’re* having our fun now.’

The general said:

'You say the wildest things.'

Tietjens answered:

'You generally find the things I say come true, sir. Could we get this over? Ruggles told my father what he did because it is not a good thing to belong to the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries in the twentieth. Or really, because it is not good to have taken one's public-school's ethical system seriously. I am really, sir, the English public schoolboy. That's an eighteenth-century product. What with the love of truth that—God help me!—they rammed into me at Clifton and the belief Arnold forced upon Rugby that the vilest of sins—the vilest of all sins—is to peach to the head master! That's me, sir. Other men get over their schooling. I never have. I remain adolescent. These things are obsessions with me. Complexes, sir!'

The general said:

'All this seems to be very wild. . . . What's this about peaching to a head master?'

Tietjens said:

'For a swan song, it's not wild, sir. You're asking for a swan song. I am to go up into the line so that the morals of the troops in your command may not be contaminated by the contemplation of my marital infelicities.'

The general said:

'You don't want to go back to England, do you?'

Tietjens exclaimed:

'Certainly not! Very certainly not! I can never go home. I have to go underground somewhere. If I went back to England there would be nothing for me but going underground by suicide.'

The general said:

'You see all that? I can give you testimonials. . . .'

Tietjens asked:

'Who couldn't see that it's impossible?'

The general said:

'But . . . suicide! You won't do that. As you said: think of your son.'

Tietjens said:

'No, sir. I shan't do that. But you see how bad for one's descendants suicide is. That is why I do not forgive my father. Before he did it I should never have contemplated the idea. Now I have contemplated it. That's a weakening of the moral fibre. It's contemplating a fallacy as a possibility. For suicide is no remedy for a twisted situation of a psychological kind. It is for bankruptcy. Or for military disaster. For the man of action, not for the thinker. Creditors' meetings wipe the one out. Military operations sweep on. But my problem will remain the same whether I'm here or not. For it's insoluble. It's the whole problem of the relations of the sexes.'

The general said:

'Good God!...'

Tietjens said:

'No, sir, I've not gone off my chump. That's my problem! ... But I'm a fool to talk so much. ... It's because I don't know what to say.'

The general sat staring at the tablecloth: his face was suffused with blood. He had the appearance of a man in monstrous ill-humour. He said:

'You had better say what you want to say. What the devil do you mean? ... What's this all about? ...'

Tietjens said:

'I'm enormously sorry, sir. It's difficult to make myself plain.'

The general said:

'Neither of us do. What is language for? What the *hell* is language for? We go round and round. I suppose I'm an old fool who cannot understand your modern ways ... But you're not modern. I'll do you *that* justice. ... That beastly little McKechnie is modern. ... I shall ram him into your divisional-transport job, so that he won't incommode you in your battalion. ... Do you understand what the little beast did? He got leave to go and get a divorce. And then did not get a divorce. *That's* modernism. He said he had scruples. I understand that he and his wife

and . . . some dirty other fellow . . . slept three in a bed. That's modern scruples. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'No, sir, it's not really. . . . But what is a man to do if his wife is unfaithful to him?'

The general said as if it were an insult:

'Divorce the harlot! Or live with her! . . . ' Only a beast he went on, would expect a woman to live all her life alone in a cockloft! She's bound to die. Or go on the streets. . . . What sort of a fellow wouldn't see that? Was there any sort of beast who'd expect a woman to live . . . with a man beside her. . . . Why, she'd . . . she'd be bound to. . . . He'd have to take the consequences of whatever happened. The general repeated: 'Whatever happened! If she pulled all the strings of all the shower-baths in the world!'

Tietjens said:

'Still, sir . . . there are . . . there used to be . . . in families of . . . position . . . a certain . . . ' He stopped.

The general said:

'Well . . . '

Tietjens said:

'On the part of the man . . . a certain . . . Call it . . . parade!'

The general said:

'Then there had better be no more parades. . . . ' He said: 'Damn it! . . . Besides us, all women are saints. . . . Think of what child-bearing is. I know the world. . . . Who would stand that? . . . You? . . . I . . . I'd rather be the last poor devil in Perry' lines!'

He looked at Tietjens with a sort of injurious cunning:

'Why *don't* you divorce?' he asked.

Panic came over Tietjens. He knew it would be his last panic of that interview. No brain could stand more. Fragments of scenes of fighting, voices, names, went before his eyes and ears. Elaborate problems. . . . The whole map of the embattled world ran out in front of him—as large as a field. An embossed map in greenish *papier mâché*—a ten-acre field of embossed *papier mâché*: with the blood of

O Nine Morgan blurring luminously over it. Years before . . . How many months? . . . Nineteen, to be exact, he had sat on some tobacco plants on the Mont de Kats. . . . No, the Montagne Noire. In Belgium. . . . What had he been doing? . . . Trying to get the lie of the land. . . . No. . . . Waiting to point out positions to some fat home general who had never come. The Belgian proprietor of the tobacco plants had arrived, and had screamed his head off over the damaged plants. . . .

But, up there you saw the whole war. . . . Infinite miles away, over the sullied land that the enemy forces held: into Germany proper. Presumably you could breathe in Germany proper. . . . Over your right shoulder you could see a stump of a tooth. The Cloth Hall at Ypres: at an angle of 50° below. . . . Dark lines behind it. . . . The German trenches before Wytschaete! . . .

That was before the great mines had blown Wytschaete to hell. . . .

But—every half-minute by his wrist-watch—white puffs of cotton-wool existed on the dark lines—the German trenches before Wytschaete. Our artillery practice. . . . Good shooting. Jolly good shooting!

Miles and miles away to the left . . . beneath the haze of light that, on a clouded day, the sea threw off, a shaft of sunlight fell, and was reflected in a grey blue. . . . It was the glass roofs of a great airplane shelter!

A great plane, the largest he had then seen, was moving over, behind his back, with four little planes as an escort. . . . Over the vast slag-heaps by Béthune. . . . High, purplish-blue heaps, like the steam domes of engines or the breasts of women. . . . Bluish purple. More blue than purple. . . . Like all Franco-Belgian Gobelins tapestry. . . . And all quiet. . . . Under the vast pall of quiet cloud! . . .

There were shells dropping in Poperinghe. . . . Five miles out, under his nose. . . . The shells dropped. White vapour rose and ran away in plumes. . . . What sort of shells? . . . There were twenty different kinds of shells. . . .

The Huns were shelling Poperinghe! A senseless cruelty.

It was five miles behind the lines! Prussian brutality... There were two girls who kept a tea-shop in Poperinghe. ... High coloured. ... General Plumer had liked them ... a fine old general. ... The shells had killed them both ... Any man might have slept with either of them with pleasure and profit. ... Six thousand of H.M. officers must have thought the same about those high-coloured girls. Good girls! ... But the Hun shells got them. ... What sort of fate was that? ... To be desired by six thousand men and smashed into little gobbets of flesh by Hun shells?

It appeared to be mere Prussianism—the senseless cruelty of the Hun!—to shell Poperinghe. An innocent town with a tea-shop five miles behind Ypres. ... Little noiseless plumes of smoke rising under the quiet blanket-ing of the pale maroon skies, with the haze from the aeroplane shelters, and the great aeroplanes over the Béthune slag-heaps. ... What a dreadful name—Béthune. ...

Probably, however, the Germans had heard that we were massing men in Poperinghe. It was reasonable to shell a town where men were being assembled. ... Or we might have been shelling one of their towns with an Army H.Q. in it. So they shelled Poperinghe in the silent grey day. ... That was according to the rules of the service. ... General Campion, accepting with equanimity what German air-planes did to the hospitals, camps, stables, brothels, theatres, boulevards, chocolate stalls and hotels of his town, would have been vastly outraged if Hun planes had dropped bombs on his private lodgings. ... The rules of war! ... You spare, mutually, each other's headquarters and blow to pieces girls that are desired by six thousand men apiece. ...

That had been nineteen months before! ... Now, having lost so much emotion, he saw the embattled world as a map. ... An embossed map of greenish *papier mâché*. The blood of O Nine Morgan was blurring luminously over it. At the extreme horizon was territory labelled *White Ruthenians!* Who the devil were *those* poor wretches?

He exclaimed to himself: 'By heavens! Is this epilepsy?'

He prayed: 'Blessed saints, get me spared that!' He exclaimed: 'No, it isn't!... I've complete control of my mind. My uppermost mind.' He said to the general:

'I can't divorce, sir. I've no grounds.'

The general said:

'Don't lie. You know what Thurston knows. Do you mean that you have been guilty of contributory misconduct?... Whatever it is? And can't divorce! I don't believe it.'

Tietjens said to himself:

'Why the devil am I so anxious to shield the whore? It's not reasonable. It is an obsession!'

White Ruthenians are miserable people to the south of Lithuania. You don't know whether they incline to the Germans or to the Poles. The Germans don't even know. . . . The Germans were beginning to take their people out of the line where we were weak: they were going to give them proper infantry training. That gave him, Tietjens, a chance. They would not come over strong for at least two months. It meant, though, a great offensive in the spring. Those fellows had sense. In the poor, beastly trenches the Tommies knew nothing but how to chuck bombs. Both sides did that. But the Germans were going to cure it! Stood chucking bombs at each other from forty yards. The rifle was obsolete! Ha! ha! Obsolete! . . . The civilian psychology!

The general said:

'No, I don't believe it. I knew you did not keep any girl in any tobacco-shop. I remember every word you said at Rye in 1912. I wasn't sure then. I am now. You tried to let me think it. You had shut up your house because of your wife's misbehaviour. You let me believe you had been sold up. You weren't sold up at all.'

. . . *Why* should it be the civilian psychology to chuckle with delight, uproariously, when the imbecile idea was promulgated that the rifle was obsolete? *Why* should public opinion force on the War Office a training-camp course that completely cut out any thorough instruction in the

rifle and communication drill? It was queer. . . . It was of course disastrous. Queer. Not altogether mean. Pathetic, too. . . .

'Love of truth!' the general said. 'Doesn't that include a hatred for white lies? No; I suppose it doesn't, or your servants could not say you were not at home. . . .'

. . . Pathetic! Tietjens said to himself. Naturally the civilian population wanted soldiers to be made to look like fools: and to be done in. They wanted the war won by men who would at the end be either humiliated or dead. Or both. Except, naturally, their own cousins or fiancées' relatives. That was what it came to. That was what it meant when important gentlemen said that they had rather the war were lost than that cavalry should gain any distinction in it! . . . But it was partly the simple, pathetic illusion of the day that great things could only be done by new inventions. You extinguished the Horse, invented something very simple and became God! That is the real pathetic fallacy. You fill a flower-pot with gunpowder and chuck it in the other fellow's face, and heigh presto! the war is won. All the soldiers fall down dead! And You: you who forced the idea on the reluctant military, are the Man that Won the War. You deserve all the women in the world. And . . . you get them! Once the cavalry are out of the way! . . .

The general was using the words:

'Head master!' It brought Tietjens completely back.

He said collectedly:

'Really, sir, why this strafe of yours is so terribly long is that it embraces the whole of life.'

The general said:

'You're not going to drag a red herring across the trail. . . . I say you regarded me as a head master in 1912. Now I am your commanding officer—which is the same thing. You must not peach to me. That's what you call the Arnold of Rugby touch. . . . But who was it said: *Magna est veritas et prev.* . . . *Prev* something!'

Tietjens said:

'I don't remember, sir.'

The general said:

'What was the secret grief your mother had? In 1912? She died of it. She wrote to me just before her death and said she had great troubles. And begged me to look after you, very specially! Why did she do that?' He paused and meditated. He asked: 'How do you define Anglican saint-hood? The other fellows have canonizations, all shipshape like Sandhurst examinations. But us Anglicans . . . I've heard fifty persons say your mother was a saint. She was. But why?'

Tietjens said:

'It's the quality of harmony, sir. The quality of being in harmony with your own soul. God having given you your own soul you are then in harmony with heaven.'

The general said:

'Ah, that's beyond me. . . . I suppose you will refuse any money I leave you in my will?'

Tietjens said:

'Why, no, sir.'

The general said:

'But you refused your father's money. Because he believed things against you. What's the difference?'

Tietjens said:

'One's friends ought to believe that one is a gentleman. Automatically. That is what makes one and them in harmony. Probably your friends are your friends because they look at situations automatically as you look at them. . . . Mr Ruggles knew that I was hard up. He envisaged the situation. If he were hard up, what would he do? Make a living out of the immoral earnings of women. . . . That translated into the Government circles in which he lives means selling your wife or mistress. Naturally he believed that I was the sort of fellow to sell my wife. So that's what he told my father. The point is, my father should not have believed him.'

'But I . . .' the general said.

Tietjens said:

'You never believed anything against me, sir.'

The general said:

'I know I've damn well worried myself to death over you...'

Tietjens was sentimental at rest, still with wet eyes. He was walking near Salisbury in a grove, regarding long pastures and ploughlands running to dark, high elms from which, embowered. . . . Embowered was the word!—peeped the spire of George Herbert's church. . . . One ought to be a seventeenth-century parson at the time of the renaissance of Anglican saintliness. . . . who wrote, perhaps poems. No, not poems. Prose. The statelier vehicle!

That was home-sickness! . . . He himself was never to go home!

The general said:

'Look here. . . . Your father. . . . I'm concerned about your father. . . . Didn't Sylvia perhaps tell him some of the things that distressed him?'

Tietjens said distinctly:

'No, sir. That responsibility cannot be put on to Sylvia. My father chose to believe things that were said against me by a perfect—or a nearly perfect—stranger. . . .' He added: 'As a matter of fact, Sylvia and my father were not on any sort of terms. I don't believe they exchanged two words for the last five years of my father's life.'

The general's eyes were fixed with an extreme hardness on Tietjens'. He watched Tietjens' face, beginning with the edges round the nostrils, go chalk white. He said: 'He knows he's given his wife away! . . . Good God!' With his face colourless, Tietjens' eyes of porcelain-blue stuck out extraordinarily. The general thought: 'What an ugly fellow! His face is all crooked!' They remained looking at each other.

In the silence the voices of men talking over the game of House came as a murmur to them. A rudimentary card game monstrously in favour of the dealer. When you heard

voices going on like that you knew they were playing House. . . . So they had had their dinners.

The general said:

'It isn't Sunday, is it?'

Tietjens said:

'No, sir; Thursday, the seventeenth, I think, of January. . . .'

The general said:

'Stupid of me. . . .'

The men's voices had reminded him of church bells on a Sunday. And of his youth. . . . He was sitting beside Mrs Tietjens' hammock under the great cedar at the corner of the stone house at Groby. The wind being from the east-north-east the bells of Middlesbrough came to them faintly. Mrs Tietjens was thirty; he himself thirty; Tietjens—the father—thirty-five or so. A most powerful quiet man. A wonderful landowner. Like his predecessor for generations. It was not from him that this fellow got his . . . his . . . his what? . . . Was it mysticism? . . . Another word! He himself home on leave from India: his head full of polo. Talking for hours about points in ponies with Tietjens' father, who was a wonderful hand with a horse.

But this fellow was much more wonderful! . . . Well, he got that from the sire, not the dam! . . . He and Tietjens continued to look at each other. It was as if they were hypnotized. The men's voices went on in a mournful cadence. The general supposed that he too must be pale. He said to himself: 'This fellow's mother died of a broken heart in 1912. The father committed suicide five years after. He had not spoken to the son's wife for four or five years! That takes us back to 1912. . . . Then, when I strafed him in Rye, the wife was in France with Perowne.'

He looked down at the blanket on the table. He intended again to look up at Tietjens' eyes with ostentatious care. That was his technique with men. He was a successful general because he knew men. He knew that all men will go to hell over three things: alcohol, money . . . and sex.

This fellow apparently hadn't. Better for him if he had! He thought:

'It's all gone . . . mother! father! Groby! This fellow's down and out. It's a bit thick.'

He thought:

'But he's right to do as he is doing.'

He prepared to look at Tietjens. . . . He stretched out a sudden, ineffectual hand. Sitting on his beef-case, his hands on his knees, Tietjens had lurched. A sudden lurch—as an old house lurches when it is hit by a H.E. shell. It stopped at that. Then he righted himself. He continued to stare direct at the general. The general looked carefully back. He said—very carefully too:

'In case I decide to contest West Cleveland, it is your wish that I should make Groby my headquarters?'

Tietjens said:

'I beg, sir, that you will!'

It was as if they both heaved an enormous sigh of relief. The general said:

'Then I need not keep you. . . .'

Tietjens stood on his feet, wanly, but with his heels together.

The general also rose, settling his belt. He said:

' . . . You can fall out.'

Tietjens said:

'My cook-houses, sir. . . . Sergeant-Cook Case will be very disappointed. . . . He told me that you couldn't find anything wrong if I gave him ten minutes to prepare. . . .'

The general said:

'Case. . . . Case. . . . Case was in the drums when we were at Delhi. He ought to be at least Quartermaster by now. . . . But he had a woman he called his sister . . .'

Tietjens said:

'He still sends money to his sister.'

The general said:

' . . . He went absent over her when he was colour-sergeant and was reduced to the ranks. . . . Twenty years ago that must be! . . . Yes, I'll see your dinners!'

In the cook-houses, brilliantly accompanied by Colonel Levin, the cook-house spotless with limed walls and mirrors that were the tops of camp-cookers, the general, Tietjens at his side, walked between goggle-eyed men in white who stood to attention holding ladles. Their eyes bulged, but the corners of their lips curved because they liked the general and his beautifully unconcerned companions. The cook-house was like a cathedral's nave, aisles being divided off by the pipes of stoves. The floor was of coke-brize shining under french polish and turpentine.

The building paused, as when a godhead descends. In breathless focusing of eyes the godhead, frail and shining, walked with short steps up to a high-priest who had a walrus moustache and, with seven medals on his Sunday tunic, gazed away into eternity. The general tapped the sergeant's Good Conduct ribbon with the heel of his crop. All stretched ears heard him say:

'How's your sister, Case? ...'

Gazing away, the sergeant said:

'I'm thinking of making her Mrs Case ...'

Slightly leaving him, in the direction of high, varnished pitch-pine panels, the general said:

'I'll recommend you for a Quartermaster's commission any day you wish. ... Do you remember Sir Garnet inspecting field kitchens at Quetta?'

All the white tubular beings with global eyes resembled the pierrots of a child's Christmas nightmare. The general said: 'Stand at ease, men. ... Stand easy!' They moved as white objects move in a childish dream. It was all childish. Their eyes rolled.

Sergeant Case gazed away into infinite distance.

'My sister would not like it, sir,' he said. 'I'm better off as a first-class warrant officer!'

With his light step the shining general went swiftly to the varnished panels in the eastern aisle of the cathedral. The white figure beside them became instantly tubular, motionless and global-eyed. On the panels were painted: TEA! SUGAR! SALT! CURRY PDR! FLOUR! PEPPER!

The general tapped with the heel of his crop on the locker-panel labelled PEPPER: the top, right-hand locker-panel. He said to the tubular, global-eyed white figure beside it: 'Open that, will you, my man? . . .'

To Tietjens this was like the sudden bursting out of the regimental quick-step, as after a funeral with military honours the band and drums march away, back to barracks.

A MAN
COULD STAND UP

PART ONE

I

SLOWLY, amidst intolerable noises from, on the one hand, the street and, on the other, from the large and voluminously echoing playground, the depths of the telephone began, for Valentine, to assume an aspect that, years ago, it had used to have—of being a part of the supernatural paraphernalia of inscrutable Destiny.

The telephone, for some ingeniously torturing reason, was in a corner of the great schoolroom without any protection, and, called imperatively, at a moment of considerable suspense, out of the asphalt playground where under her command ranks of girls had stood electrically only just within the margin of control, Valentine with the receiver at her ear was plunged immediately into incomprehensible news uttered by a voice that she seemed half to remember. Right in the middle of a sentence it hit her:

‘... that he ought presumably to be under control, which you mightn’t like!’; after that the noise burst out again and rendered the voice inaudible.

It occurred to her that probably at that minute the whole population of the world needed to be under control; she knew she herself did. But she had no male relative that the verdict could apply to in especial. Her brother? But he was on a minesweeper. In dock at the moment. And now... safe for good! There was also an aged great-uncle that she had never seen. Dean of somewhere... Hereford? Exeter?... Somewhere... Had she just said *safe*? She was shaken with joy!

She said into the mouthpiece:

'Valentine Wannop speaking. . . . Physical Instructress at this school, you know.'

She had to present an appearance of sanity . . . a sane voice at the very least!

The tantalizingly half-remembered voice on the telephone now got in some more incomprehensibilities. It came as if from caverns and as if with exasperated rapidity it exaggerated its s's with an effect of spitting vehemence.

'His brothers.s.s got pneumonia, so his mistress.ss.ss even is unavailable to look after. . . .'

The voice disappeared; then it emerged again with:

'They're said to be friends now!'

It was drowned then, for a long period in a sea of shrill girls' voices from the playground, in an ocean of factory-hooters' ululations, amongst innumerable explosions that trod upon one another's heels. From where on earth did they get explosives, the population of squalid suburban streets amidst which the school lay? For the matter of that where did they get the spirits to make such an appalling row? Pretty drab people! Inhabiting liver-coloured boxes. Not on the face of it an imperial race.

The sibilating voice on the telephone went on spitting out spitefully that the porter said he had no furniture at all; that he did not appear to recognize the porter. . . . Improbable-sounding pieces of information half-extinguished by the external sounds but uttered in a voice that seemed to mean to give pain by what it said.

Nevertheless it was impossible not to take it gaily. The thing, out there, miles and miles away must have been signed—a few minutes ago. She imagined along an immense line sullen and disgruntled cannon sounding for a last time.

'I haven't,' Valentine Wannop shouted into the mouth-piece, 'the least idea of what you want or who you are.'

She got back a title. . . . Lady someone or other. . . . It might have been Blastus. She imagined that one of the lady governesses of the school must be wanting to order something in the way of school sports organized to cele-

brate the auspicious day. A lady governess or other was always wanting something done by the School to celebrate something. No doubt the Head who was not wanting in a sense of humour—not *absolutely* wanting!—had turned this lady of title on to Valentine Wannop after having listened with patience to her for half an hour. The Head had certainly sent out to where in the playground they had all stood breathless, to tell Valentine Wannop that there was someone on the telephone that she—Miss Wanostrocht, the said Head—thought that she, Miss Wannop, ought to listen to. . . . Then Miss Wanostrocht must have been able to distinguish what had been said by the now indistinguishable lady of title. But of course that had been ten minutes ago. . . . Before the maroons or the sirens, whichever it had been, had sounded. . . . 'The porter said he had no furniture at all. . . . He did not appear to recognize the porter. . . . Ought presumably to be under control!'. . . Valentine's mind thus recapitulated the information that she had from Lady (provisionally) Blastus. She imagined now that the Lady must be concerned for the superannuated drill-sergeant the school had had before it had acquired her, Valentine, as physical instructor. She figured to herself the venerable, mumbling gentleman, with several ribbons on a black commissionaire's tunic. In an almshouse, probably. Placed there by the Governors of the school. Had pawned his furniture, no doubt. . . .

Intense heat possessed Valentine Wannop. She imagined indeed her eyes flashing. Was this the moment?

She didn't even know whether what they had let off had been maroons or aircraft guns or sirens. It had happened—the noise, whatever it was—whilst she had been coming through the underground passage from the playground to the schoolroom to answer this wicked telephone. So she had not heard the sound. She had missed the sound for which the ears of a world had waited for years, for a generation. For an eternity. No sound. When she had left the playground there had been dead silence. All waiting: girls rubbing one ankle with the other rubber sole. . . .

Then. . . For the rest of her life she was never able to remember the greatest stab of joy that had ever been known by waiting millions. There would be no one but she who would not be able to remember that. . . Probably a stirring of the heart that was like a stab; probably a catching of the breath that was like an inhalation of flame! . . . It was over now; they were by now in a situation; a condition, something that would affect certain things in certain ways. . .

She remembered that the putative ex-drill-sergeant had a brother who had pneumonia and thus an unavailable mistress. . .

She was about to say to herself:

'That's just my luck!' when she remembered good-humouredly that her luck was not like that at all. On the whole she had had good luck—ups and downs. A good deal of anxiety at one time—but who hadn't had! But good health; a mother with good health; a brother safe. . . Anxieties, yes! But nothing that had gone so very wrong. . .

This then was an exceptional stroke of bad luck! Might it be no omen—to the effect that things in future *would* go wrong: to the effect that she would miss other universal experiences. Never marry, say; or never know the joy of childbearing: if it was a joy! Perhaps it was; perhaps it wasn't. One said one thing, one another. At any rate might it not be an omen that she would miss some universal and necessary experience! . . . Never see Carcassonne, the French said. . . Perhaps she would never see the Mediterranean. You could not be a proper man if you had never seen the Mediterranean: the sea of Tibullus, of the Anthologists, of Sappho, even. . . Blue: incredibly blue!

People would be able to travel now. It was incredible! Incredible! Incredible! But you *could*. Next week you would be able to! You could call a taxi! And go to Charing Cross! And have a porter! A whole porter! . . . The wings, the wings of a dove: then would I flee away, flee away and eat pomegranates beside an infinite wash-tub of Reckitt's blue. Incredible, but you *could*!

She felt eighteen again. Cocky! She said, using the good, metallic, Cockney bottoms of her lungs that she had used for shouting back at interrupters at Suffrage meetings before . . . before this . . . she shouted blatantly into the telephone:

'I say, whoever you are! I suppose they have *done* it; did they announce it in your parts by maroons or sirens?' She repeated it three times, she did not care for Lady Blastus or Lady Blast Anybody else. She was going to leave that old school and eat pomegranates in the shadow of the rock where Penelope, the wife of Ulysses, did her washing. With lashings of blue in the water! Was all your under-linen bluish in those parts owing to the colour of the sea? She could! She could! She *could*! Go with her mother and brother and all to where you could eat . . . Oh new potatoes! In December, the sea being blue. . . . *What songs the Sirens sang and whether. . . .*

She was not going to show respect for any Lady anything ever again. She had had to hitherto, independent young woman of means though she were, so as not to damage the School and Miss Wanostrocht with the Governoresses. Now . . . She was never going to show respect for anyone ever again. She had been through the mill: the whole world had been through the mill! No more respect!

As she might have expected she got it in the neck immediately afterwards—for over-cockiness!

The hissing, bitter voice from the telephone enunciated the one address she did not want to hear:

'Lincolnss..s.s. . . . sInn!'

Sin! . . . Like the Devil!

It hurt.

The cruel voice said:

'I'm s.s.peaking from there!'

Valentine said courageously:

'Well; it's a great day. I suppose you're bothered by the cheering like me. I can't hear what you want. I don't care. Let 'em cheer!'

She felt like that. She should not have.

The voice said:

'You remember your Carlyle. . . .'

It was exactly what she did not want to hear. With the receiver hard at her ear she looked round at the great schoolroom—the Hall, made to let a thousand girls sit silent while the Head made the speeches that were the note of the School. Repressive! . . . The place was like a non-conformist chapel. High, bare walls with Gothic windows running up to a pitch-pine varnished roof. Repression, the note of the place; the place, the very place not to be in to-day. . . . You *ought* to be in the streets, hitting policemen's helmets with bladders. This was Cockney London: that was how Cockney London expressed itself. Hit policemen innocuously because policemen were stiff, embarrassed at these tributes of affection, swayed in rejoicing mobs over whose heads they looked remotely, like poplar trees jostled by vulgarer vegetables!

But she was there, being reminded of the dyspepsia of Thomas Carlyle!

'Oh!' she exclaimed into the instrument, 'You're Edith Ethel!' Edith Ethel Duchemin, now of course Lady Macmaster! But you weren't used to thinking of her as Lady Somebody.

The last person in the world: the very last! Because long ago she had made up her mind that it was all over between herself and Edith Ethel. She certainly could not make any advance to the ennobled personage who vindictively disapproved of all things made—with a black thought in a black shade, as you might say. Of all things that were not being immediately useful to Edith Ethel!

And, aesthetically draped and meagre, she had sets of quotations for appropriate occasions. Rossetti for Love; Browning for optimism—not frequent that: Walter Savage Landor to show acquaintance with more esoteric prose. And the unfailing quotation from Carlyle for damping off saturnalia: for New Year's Day, Te Deums, Victories, anniversaries, celebrations. . . . It was coming over the wire now, that quotation:

'... And then I remembered that it was the birthday of their Redeemer!'

How well Valentine knew it: how often with spiteful conceit had not Edith Ethel intoned that. A passage from the diary of the Sage of Chelsea who lived near the Barracks.

'To-day,' the quotation ran, 'I saw that the soldiers by the public house at the corner were more than usually drunk. And then I remembered that it was the birthday of their Redeemer!'

How superior of the Sage of Chelsea not to remember till then that that had been Christmas Day! Edith Ethel, too, was trying to show how superior she was. She wanted to prove that until she, Valentine Wannop, had reminded her, Lady Macmaster, that that day had about it something of the popular festival she, Lady Mac, had been unaware of the fact. Really quite unaware, you know. She lived in her rapt seclusion along with Sir Vincent—the critic, you know: their eyes fixed on the higher things, they disregarded maroons and had really a quite remarkable collection, by now, of first editions, official-titled friends and At Homes to their credit.

Yet Valentine remembered that once she had sat at the feet of the darkly mysterious Edith Ethel Duchemin—where had *that* all gone?—and had sympathized with her marital martyrdoms, her impressive taste in furniture, her large rooms and her spiritual adulteries. So she said good-humouredly to the instrument:

'Aren't you just the same, Edith Ethel? And what can I do for you?'

The good-natured patronage in her tone astonished her, and she was astonished, too, at the ease with which she spoke. Then she realized that the noises had been going away: silence was falling: the cries receded. They were going towards a cumulation at a distance. The girls' voices in the playground no longer existed: the Head must have let them go. Naturally, too, the local population wasn't

going to go on letting off crackers in side streets. . . . She was alone: cloistered with the utterly improbable!

Lady Macmaster had sought her out and here was she, Valentine Wannop, patronizing Lady Macmaster! Why? What could Lady Macmaster want her to do? She *couldn't*—but of course she jolly well could!—be thinking of being unfaithful to Macmaster and be wanting her, Valentine Wannop, to play the innocent, the virginal gooseberry or Disciple. Or alibi. Whatever it was. Goose was the most appropriate word. . . . Obviously Macmaster was the sort of person to whom any Lady Macmaster would want—would have—to be unfaithful. A little, dark-bearded, drooping deprecatory fellow. A typical Critic! All Critics' wives were probably unfaithful to them. They lacked the creative gift. What did you call it? A word unfit for a young lady to use!

Her mind ran about in this unbridled, Cockney school-girl's vein. There was no stopping it. It was in honour of the DAY! She was temporarily inhibited from bashing policemen on the head, so she was mentally disrespectful to constituted authority—to Sir Vincent Macmaster, Principal Secretary to H.M. Department of Statistics, author of *Walter Savage Landor, a Critical Monograph*, and of twenty-two other Critical Monographs in the Eminent Bores' Series. . . . *Such* books! And she was being disrespectful and patronizing to Lady Macmaster, Egeria to innumerable Scottish Men of Letters! No more respect! Was that to be a lasting effect of the cataclysm that had involved the world? The *late* cataclysm! Thank God, since ten minutes ago they could call it the late cataclysm!

She was positively tittering in front of the telephone from which Lady Macmaster's voice was now coming in earnest, cajoling tones—as if she knew that Valentine was not paying very much attention, saying:

'Valentine! Valentine! Valentine!'

Valentine said negligently:

'I'm listening!'

She wasn't really. She was really reflecting on whether

there had not been more sense in the Mistresses' Conference that that morning, solemnly, had taken place in the Head's private room. Undoubtedly what the Mistresses with the Head at their head had feared was that if they, Headmistresses, Mistresses, Masters, Pastors—by whom I was made etcetera!—should cease to be respected because saturnalia broke out on the sounding of a maroon the whole world would go to pieces! An awful thought! The Girls no longer sitting silent in the nonconformist hall while the Head addressed repressive speeches to them. . . .

She had addressed a speech, containing the phrase 'the Credit of a Great Public School', in that Hall only last afternoon in which, fair thin woman, square-elbowed, with a little of sunlight really still in her coiled fair hair, she had seriously requested the Girls not again to repeat the manifestations of joy of the day before. The day before there had been a false alarm and the School—horribly!—had sung:

'Hang Kaiser Bill from the hoar apple tree
And Glory Glory Glory till it's tea-time!'

The Head, making her speech, was certain that she had now before her a chastened School, a School that anyhow felt foolish because the rumour of the day before had turned out to be a canard. So she impressed on the Girls the nature of the joy they ought to feel: a joy repressed that should send them silent home. Blood was to cease to be shed: a fitting cause for home-joy—as it were a home-lesson. But there was to be no triumph. The very fact that you ceased hostilities precluded triumph. . . .

Valentine, to her surprise, had found herself wondering when you *might* feel triumph. . . . You couldn't whilst you were still contending: you must not when you had won! Then when? The Head told the girls that it was their province as the future mothers of England—nay, of reunited Europe!—to—well, in fact, to go on with their home-lessons and not run about the streets with effigies of the Great Defeated! She put it that it was their function

to shed further light of womanly culture—that there, thank Heaven, they had never been allowed to forget!—athwart a re-illuminated Continent. . . . As if you could light up now there was no fear of submarines or raids!

And Valentine wondered why, for a mutinous moment, she had wanted to feel triumph . . . had wanted *someone* to feel triumph. Well, he . . . they . . . had wanted it so much. Couldn't they have it just for a moment—for the space of one Benkollerdy! Even if it were wrong? or vulgar? Something human, someone had once said, is dearer than a wilderness of decalogues!

But at the Mistresses' Conference that morning, Valentine had realized that what was really frightening them was the other note. A quite definite fear. If, at this parting of the ways, at this crack across the table of History, the School—the World, the future mothers of Europe—got out of hand, would they ever come back? The Authorities—Authority all over the world—was afraid of that; more afraid of that than of any other thing. Wasn't it a possibility that there was to be no more Respect? None for constituted Authority and consecrated Experience?

And, listening to the fears of those careworn, faded, ill-nourished gentlewomen, Valentine Wannop had found herself speculating.

'No more respect. . . . For the Equator! For the Metric system. For Sir Walter Scott! Or George Washington! Or Abraham Lincoln! Or the Seventh Commandment!!!!!!'

And she had a blushing vision of fair, shy, square-elbowed Miss Wanostrocht—the Head!—succumbing to some specious-tongued beguiler! . . . That was where the shoe really pinched! You had to keep them—the Girls, the Populace, everybody!—in hand now, for once you let go there was no knowing where They, like waters parted from the seas, mightn't carry You. Goodness knew! You might arrive anywhere—at county families taking to trade; gentle-folk selling for profit! All the unthinkable sorts of things!

And with a little inward smirk of pleasure Valentine realized that that Conference was deciding that the Girls

were to be kept in the playground that morning—at Physical Jerks. She hadn't ever put up with *much* in the way of patronage from the rather untidy-haired bookish branch of the establishment. Still, accomplished Classicist as she once had been, she had had to acknowledge that the bookish branch of a School was what you might call the Senior Service. She was there only to oblige—because her distinguished father had insisted on paying minute attention to her physique which was vital and admirable. She had been there, for some time past only to oblige—War Work and all that—but still she had always kept her place and had never hitherto raised her voice at a Mistresses' Conference. So it was indeed the World Turned Upside Down—already!—when Miss Wanostrocht hopefully from behind her desk decorated with two pale pink carnations said:

'The idea is, Miss Wannop, that They should be kept—that you should keep them, please—as nearly as possible—isn't it called?—at attention until the—eh—noises... announce the... well, *you* know. Then we suppose they will have to give, say, three cheers. And then perhaps you could get them—in an orderly way—back to their classrooms....'

Valentine felt that she was by no means certain that she *could*. It was not really practicable to keep every one of six hundred aligned girls under your eye. Still she was ready to have a shot. She was ready to concede that it might not be altogether—oh, expedient!—to turn six hundred girls stark mad with excitement into the streets already filled with populations that would no doubt be also stark mad with excitement. You had better keep them in if you could. She would have a shot. And she was pleased. She felt fit: amazingly fit! Fit to do the quarter in... oh, in any time! And to give a clump on the jaw to any large, troublesome Jewish type of maiden—or Anglo-Teutonic—who should try to break ranks. Which was more than the Head or any one of the other worried and underfed ones could do. She was pleased that they recognized it. Still she was also

generous, and recognizing that the world ought not really to be turned upside down at any rate until the maroons went, she said:

‘Of course I will have a shot at it. But it would be a reinforcement, in the way of keeping order, if the Head—you, Miss Wanostrocht—and one or two others of the Mistresses would be strolling about. In relays of course; not all of the staff all the morning . . .’

That had been two and a half hours or so ago: before the world changed, the Conference having taken place at eight-thirty. Now here she was, after having kept those girls pretty exhaustingly jumping about for most of the intervening time—here she was treating with disrespect obviously constituted Authority. For whom *ought* you to respect if not the wife of the Head of a Department, with a title, a country place and most highly attended Thursday afternoons?

She was not really listening to the telephone because Edith Ethel was telling her about the condition of Sir Vincent: so overworked, poor man, over Statistics that a nervous breakdown was imminently to be expected. Worried over money, too. Those dreadful taxes for this iniquitous affair. . . .

Valentine took leisure to wonder why—why in the world!—Miss Wanostrocht, who must know at the least the burden of Edith Ethel’s story, had sent for her to hear this farrago? Miss Wanostrocht must know: she had obviously been talked to by Edith Ethel for long enough to form a judgment. Then the matter must be of importance. Urgent even, since the keeping of discipline in the playground was of such utter importance to Miss Wanostrocht: a crucial point in the history of the School and the mothers of Europe.

But to whom then could Lady Macmaster’s communication be of life and death importance? To her, Valentine Wannop? It could not be: there were no events of importance that could affect her life outside the playground, her

mother safe at home and her brother safe on a mine-sweeper in Pembroke Dock. . . .

Then . . . of importance to Lady Macmaster herself? But how? What could she do for Lady Macmaster? Was she wanted to teach Sir Vincent to perform physical exercises so that he might avoid his nervous breakdown and, in excess of physical health, get the mortgage taken off his country place which she gathered was proving an overwhelming burden on account of iniquitous taxes the result of a war that ought never to have been waged?

It was absurd to think that she could be wanted for that! An absurd business. . . . There she was, bursting with health, strength, good-humour, perfectly *full* of beans—there she was, ready in the cause of order to give Leah Heldenstamm, the large girl, no end of a clump on the side of the jaw or, alternatively, for the sake of all the beanfeastishnesses in the world to assist in the amiable discomfiture of the police. There she was in a sort of nonconformist cloister. Nunlike! Positively nunlike! At the parting of the ways of the universe!

She whistled slightly to herself.

'By Jove,' she exclaimed coolly, 'I hope it does not mean an omen that I'm to be—oh, nunlike—for the rest of my career in the reconstructed world!'

She began for a moment seriously to take stock of her position—of her whole position in life. It had certainly been hitherto rather nunlike. She was twenty-threeish: rising twenty-four. As fit as a fiddle; as clean as a whistle. Five foot four in her gym shoes. And no one had ever wanted to marry her. No doubt that was because she was so clean and fit. No one even had ever tried to seduce her. That was *certainly* because she was so clean-run. She didn't obviously offer—What was it the fellow called it?—promise of pneumatic bliss to the gentlemen with sergeant-majors' horse-shoe moustaches and gurglish voices! She never would. Then perhaps she would never marry. And never be seduced!

Nunlike! She would have to stand at an attitude of

attention beside a telephone all her life; in an empty school-room with the world shouting from the playground. Or not even shouting from the playground any more. Gone to Piccadilly!

... But, hang it all, she wanted some fun! Now!

For years now she had been—oh, yes, nunlike!—looking after the lungs and limbs of the girls of the adenoidy, non-conformistish—really undenominational or so little Established as made no difference!—Great Public Girls' School. She had had to worry about impossible but not repulsive little Cockney creatures' breathing when they had their arms extended. . . . You *mustn't* breathe rhythmically with your movements. No. No. *No!* . . . *Don't* breathe out with the first movement and in with the second! Breathe naturally! Look at me! . . . She breathed perfectly!

Well, for years that! War-work for a b——y Pro-German. Or Pacifist. Yes, that too she had been for years. She hadn't liked being it because it was the attitude of the superior and she did not like being superior. Like Edith Ethel!

But now! Wasn't it manifest? She could put her hand whole-heartedly into the hand of any Tom, Dick, or Harry. And wish him luck! Whole-heartedly! Luck for himself and for his enterprise. She came back: into the fold: into the Nation even. She could open her mouth! She could let out the good little Cockney yelps that were her birthright! She could be free, independent!

Even her dear, blessed, muddle-headed, tremendously eminent mother by now had a depressed looking Secretary. She, Valentine Wannop, didn't have to sit up all night typing after all day enjoining perfection of breathing in the playground. . . . By Jove, they could go all, brother, mother in untidy black and mauve, secretary in untidy black without mauve, and she, Valentine, out of her imitation Girl Scout's uniform and in—oh, white muslin or Harris tweeds—and with Cockney yawps discuss the cooking under the stone-pines of Amalfi. By the Mediterranean. . . . No one, then, would be able to say that she had never

seen the sea of Penelope, the Mother of the Gracchi, Delia, Lesbia, Nausicaa, Sappho. . . .

'Saepe te in somnis vidi!'

She said:

'Good . . . God!'

Not in the least with a Cockney intonation but like a good Tory English gentleman confronted by an unspeakable proposition. Well: it was an unspeakable proposition. For the voice from the telephone had been saying to her inattention, rather crawlingly, after no end of details as to the financial position of the house of Macmaster:

'So I thought, my dear Val, in remembrance of old times; that . . . If in short I were the means of bringing you together again. . . . For I believe you have not been corresponding. . . . You might in return. . . . You can see for yourself that at this moment the sum would be absolutely crushing. . . .'

II

Ten minutes later she was putting to Miss Wanostrocht, firmly if without ferocity, the question:

'Look here, Head, what did that woman say to you? I don't like her; I don't approve of her and I didn't really listen to her. But I want to hear!'

Miss Wanostrocht, who had been taking her thin, black cloth coat from its peg behind the highly varnished pitch-pine door of her own private cell, flushed, hung up her garment again and turned from the door. She stood, thin, a little rigid, a little flushed, faded and a little as it were at bay.

'You must remember,' she began, *'that I am a school-mistress.'* She pressed, with a gesture she constantly had, the noticeably golden plait of her dun-coloured hair with the palm of her thin left hand. None of the gentlewomen of that school had had quite enough to eat—for years now. *'It's,'* she continued, *'an instinct to accept any means of*

knowledge. I like you so much, Valentine—if in private you'll let me call you that. And it seemed to me that if you were in . . .'

'In what?' Valentine asked. 'Danger? . . . Trouble?'

'You understand,' Miss Wanostrocht replied, 'that . . . person seemed as anxious to communicate to me facts about yourself as to give you—that was her ostensible reason for ringing you up—news. About a . . . another person. With whom you once had . . . relations. And who has reappeared.'

'Ah,' Valentine heard herself exclaim. 'He has reappeared, has he? I gathered as much.' She was glad to be able to keep her under control to that extent.

Perhaps she did not have to trouble. She could not say that she felt changed from what she had been—just before ten minutes ago, by the reappearance of a man she hoped she had put out of her mind. A man who had 'insulted' her. In one way or the other he had insulted her!

But probably all her circumstances had changed. Before Edith Ethel had uttered her impossible sentence in that instrument her complete prospects had consisted of no more than the family picnic, under fig-trees, beside an unusually blue sea—and the prospect had seemed as near—as near as kiss your finger! Mother in black and purple; mother's secretary in black without adornments. Brother? Oh, a romantic figure; slight, muscular, in white flannels with a Leghorn hat and—well, why *not* be romantic over one's brother—with a broad scarlet sash. One foot on shore and one . . . in a light skiff that gently bobbed in the lapping tide. Nice boy; nice little brother. Lately employed nautically, so up to managing a light skiff. They were going to-morrow . . . but why not that very afternoon by the 4.20?

'They'd got the ships, they'd got the men,
They'd got the money too!'

Thank goodness they'd got the money!

The ships, Charing Cross to Vallombrosa, would no

doubt run in a fortnight. The men—the porters—would also be released. You can't travel in any comfort with mother, mother's secretary and brother—with your whole world and its baggage—without lots of porters. . . . Talk about rationed butter! What was that to trying to get on without porters?

Once having begun it her mind went on singing the old eighteen-fiftyish, or seventyish, martial, British, anti-Russian patriotic song that one of her little friends had unearthed lately—to prove the historic ferocity of his countrymen:

'We've fought the Bear before,
And so we will again!
The Russians shall not have Constantino . . .'

She exclaimed suddenly: '*Oh!*'

She had been about to say: '*Oh, Hell!*' but the sudden recollection that the War had been over a quarter of an hour made her leave it at '*Oh!*' You would have to drop war-time phraseology! You became again a Young Lady. Peace, too, has its Defence of the Realm Acts. Nevertheless, she has been thinking of the man who had once insulted her as the Bear, whom she would have to fight again! But with warm generosity she said:

'It's a shame to call him the Bear!' Nevertheless he was—the man who was said to have 'reappeared'—with his problems and all, something devouring. . . . Overwhelming, with rolling grey shoulders that with their intolerable problems pushed you and your own problems out of the road. . . .

She had been thinking all that while still in the School Hall, before she had gone to see the Head: immediately after Edith Ethel, Lady Macmaster had uttered the *intolerable* sentence.

She had gone on thinking there for a long time. . . . Ten minutes!

She formulated for herself summarily the first item of a period of nasty worries of a time she flattered herself she

had nearly forgotten. Years ago, Edith Ethel, out of a clear sky, had accused her of having had a child by that man. But she hardly thought of him as a man. She thought of him as a ponderous, grey, intellectual mass who now, presumably, was mooning, obviously dotty, since he did not recognize the porter, behind the closed shutters of an empty house in Lincoln's Inn. . . . Nothing less, I assure you! She had never been in that house, but she figured him, with cracks of light coming between the shutters, looking back over his shoulder at you in the doorway, grey, superursine. . . . Ready to envelop you in suffocating bothers!

She wondered how long it had been since the egregious Edith Ethel had made that assertion . . . with, naturally, every appearance of indignation for the sake of the man's Wife with whom, equally naturally, Edith Ethel had 'sided'. (Now she was trying to 'bring you together again'. . . . The Wife, presumably, did not go to Edith Ethel's tea-parties often enough, or was too brilliantly conspicuous when there. Probably the latter!) . . . How many years ago? Two? Not so much! Eighteen months, then? Surely more! . . . surely, surely more! . . . When you thought of Time in those days your mind wavered impotently like eyes tired by reading too small print. . . . He went out surely in the autumn of . . . No, it had been the first time he went that he went in the autumn. It was her brother's friend, Ted, that went in '16. Or the other . . . Malachi. So many goings out and returnings: and goings out and perhaps not returning. Or only in bits: the nose gone . . . or both eyes. Or—or, Hell! oh, Hell! and she clenched her fists, her nails into her palms—no mind!

You'd think it must be that from what Edith Ethel had said. He hadn't recognized the porter: he was reported to have no furniture. Then . . . She remembered. . . .

She was then—ten minutes before she interviewed Miss Wanostrocht; ten seconds after she had been blown out of the mouth of the telephone—sitting on a varnished pitch-pine bench that had black iron-clamped legs against the

plaster wall, non-conformistically distempered in torpedo grey; and she had thought all that in ten seconds. . . . But that had been *really* how it had been!

The minute Edith Ethel had finished saying the words:

'The sum would be absolutely *crushing*. . . .' Valentine had realized that she had been talking about a debt owed by her miserable husband to the one human being she, Valentine, could bear to think about. It had naturally at the same moment flashed upon her that Edith Ethel had been giving her his news. He was in new troubles: broken down, broken up, broke to the wide. . . . Anything in the world but broken in. . . . But broken. . . . And alone. . . . And calling for her!

She could not afford—she could not bear!—to recall even his name or to so much as bring up before her mind, into which, nevertheless, they were continually forcing themselves, his grey-blond face, his clumsy, square, reliable feet; his humpish bulk; his calculatedly wooden expression; his perfectly overwhelming, but authentic omniscience. . . . His masculinity. His . . . his Frightfulness!

Now, through Edith Ethel—you would have thought that even *he* would have found someone more appropriate—he was calling to her again to enter into the suffocating web of his imbroglios. Not even Edith Ethel would have dared to speak to her again of him without his having taken the first step. . . .

It was unthinkable; it was intolerable; and it had been as if she had been lifted off her feet and deposited on that bench against the wall by the mere sound of the offer. . . . What was the offer?

'I thought that you might, if I were the means of bringing you together . . . ' She might . . . what?

Intercede with that man, that grey mass, not to enforce the pecuniary claim that it had against Sir Vincent Macmaster. No doubt she and . . . the grey mass! . . . would then be allowed the Macmaster drawing-room to . . . to discuss the ethics of the day in! Just like that!

She was still breathless; the telephone continued to

quack. She wished it would stop but she felt too weak to get up and hang the receiver on its hook. She wished it would stop; it gave her the feeling that a strand of Edith Ethel's hair, say, was penetrating nauseously to her torpedo grey cloister. Something like that!

The grey mass never would enforce its pecuniary claim. . . . Those people had sponged mercilessly on him for years and years without ever knowing the kind of object upon which they sponged. It made them the more pitiful. For it *was* pitiful to clamour to be allowed to become a pimp in order to evade debts that would never be reclaimed. . . .

Now, in the empty rooms at Lincoln's Inn—for that was probably what it came to!—that man was a grey ball of mist; a grey bear rolling tenebrously about an empty room with closed shutters. A grey problem! Calling to *her*!

A hell of a lot. . . . Beg pardon, she meant a remarkably great deal! . . . to have thought of in ten seconds! Eleven, by now, probably. Later she realized that that was what thought was. In ten minutes after large impassive arms had carried you away from a telephone and deposited you on a clamped bench against a wall of the peculiar coldness of torpedo-grey distempered plaster, the sort of thing rejoiced in by Great Public (Girls') Schools . . . in those ten minutes you found you thought out more than in two years. Or it was not as long ago as that.

Perhaps that was not astonishing. If you had not thought about, say, washable distemper for two years and then thought about it for ten minutes you could think a hell of a lot about it in those ten minutes. Probably all there was to think. Still, of course, washable distemper was not like the poor—always with you. At least it always was in those cloisters, but not spiritually. On the other hand you always *were* with yourself!

But perhaps you were not always with yourself spiritually; you went on explaining how to breathe without thinking of how the life you were leading was influencing your . . . What? Immortal soul? Aura? Personality? . . . Something!

Well, for two years. . . . Oh, *call* it two years, for goodness' sake, and get it over! . . . she must have been in . . . well, call *that* a 'state of suspended animation' and get that over too! A sort of what they called inhibition. She had been inhibiting—*prohibiting*—herself from thinking about herself. Well, hadn't she been right? What had a b——y Pro-German to think about in an embattled, engrossed, clamouring nation: especially when she had not much liked her brother-Pro's! A solitary state, only to be dissolved by . . . maroons! In suspension!

But . . . Be conscientious with yourself, my good girl! *When that telephone blew you out of its mouth you knew really that for two years you had been avoiding wondering whether you had not been insulted!* Avoiding wondering that. And nothing else! No other qualified thing.

She had, of course, been, not in suspension, but in suspense. Because, if he made a sign—"I understand," Edith Ethel had said, 'that you have not been in correspondence' . . . or had it been 'in communication' that she had said? . . . Well, they hadn't been either. . . .

Anyhow, if that grey Problem, that ravelled ball of grey knitting worsted, had made a sign she would have known that she had not been insulted. Or was there any sense in that?

Was it really true that if a male and female of the same species were alone in a room together and the male didn't . . . then it was an insult? That was an idea that did not exist in a girl's head without someone to put it there, but once it had been put there it became a luminous veracity! It had been put into her, Valentine Wannop's, head, naturally by Edith Ethel, who equally naturally said that she did not believe it, but that it was a tenet of . . . oh, the man's wife! Of the idle, surpassing-the-Lily-and-Solomon-too, surprisingly svelte, tall, clean-run creature who for ever on the shiny paper of illustrated journals advanced towards you with improbable strides along the railings of the Row, laughing, in company with the Honourable Somebody, second son of Lord Someone-or-other. . . .

Edith Ethel was more refined. She had a title, whereas the other hadn't, but she was pensive. She showed you that she had read *Walter Savage Landor*, and had only very lately given up wearing opaque amber beads, as affected by the later pre-Raphaelites. She was practically never in the illustrated papers, but she held more refined views. She held that there were some men who were not like that—and those, all of them, were the men to whom Edith Ethel accorded the *entrée* to her Afternoons. She was their Egeria! A refining influence!

The Husband of the Wife then? Once he had been allowed in Edith Ethel's drawing room: now he wasn't! ... Must have deteriorated!

She said to herself sharply, in her 'No nonsense, there' mood:

'Chuck it. You're in love with a married man who's a Society wife and you're upset because the Titled Lady has put into your head the idea that you might "come together again". After ten years!'

But immediately she protested:

'No. NO. No! It isn't that. It's all right the habit of putting things incisively, but it's misleading to put things too crudely.'

What was the coming together that was offered her? Nothing, on the face of it, but being dragged again into that man's intolerable worries as unfortunate machinists are dragged into wheels by belts—and all the flesh torn off their bones! Upon her word that had been her first thought. She was afraid, afraid, afraid! She suddenly appreciated the advantages of nunlike seclusion. Besides she wanted to be bashing policemen with bladders in celebration of Eleven Eleven!

That fellow—he had no furniture; he did not appear to recognize the hall porter.... Dotty. Dotty and too morally deteriorated to be admitted to drawing-room of titled lady, the frequenters of which could be trusted not to make love to you on insufficient provocation, if left alone with you....

Her generous mind reacted painfully.

'Oh, that's not *fair*!' she said.

There were all sorts of sides to the unfairness. Before this War, and, of course, before he had lent all his money to Vincent Macmaster that—that grey grizzly had been perfectly fit for the country-parsonage drawing-room of Edith Ethel Duchemin: he had been welcomed there with effusion! . . . After the War and when his money was—presumably exhausted, and his mind exhausted, for he had no furniture and did not know the porter. . . . After the War, then, and when his money was exhausted he was not fit for the Salon of Lady Macmaster—the only Lady to have a Salon in London.

It was what you called kicking down your ladder!

Obviously it had to be done. There were such a lot of these bothering War heroes that if you let them all into your Salon it would cease to be a Salon, particularly if you were under an obligation to them! . . . That was already a pressing national problem: it was going to become an overwhelming one now—in twenty minutes' time; after those maroons. The impoverished War Heroes would all be coming back. Innumerable. You would have to tell your parlourmaid that you weren't at home to . . . about seven million!

But wait a minute. . . . Where did they just stand?

He. . . . But she could not go on calling him just He like a school-girl of eighteen, thinking of her favourite actor . . . in the purity of her young thoughts. What was she to call him? She had never—even when they had known each other—called him anything other than Mr So and So. . . . She could not bring herself to let her mental lips frame his name. . . . She had never used anything but his surname to this grey thing, familiar object of her mother's study, seen frequently at tea-parties. . . . Once she had been out with it for a whole night in a dog-cart! Think of that! . . . And they had spouted Tibullus one to another in moonlit mist. And she had certainly wanted it to kiss her—in

the moonlit mists, a practically, a really completely strange bear!

It couldn't be done, of course, but she remembered still how she had shivered.... Ph... Ph... Ph... Shivering. She shivered.

Afterwards they had been run into by the car of General Lord Edward Campion, V.C., P.G., Heaven knows what! Godfather of the man's Society Wife, then taking the waters in Germany.... Or perhaps not *her* Godfather. The man's rather; but her especial champion, in shining armour. In these days they had worn broad red stripes down the outsides of their trousers, Generals. What a change! *How* significant of the times!

That had been in 1912.... Say the first of July; she could not remember exactly. Summer weather, anyhow, before haymaking or just about. The grass had been long in Hogg's Forty Acre, when they had walked through it, discussing Woman's Suffrage. She had brushed the seed-tops of the heavy grass with her hands as they walked.... Say the 1/7/12.

Now it was Eleven Eleven.... What? Oh, Eighteen, of course!

Six years ago! What changes in the world! What cataclysms! What Revolutions!... She heard all the newspapers, all the halfpenny-paper journalists in creation crying in chorus!

But hang it: it was true! If, six years ago, she had kissed the... the greyish lacuna of her mind then sitting beside her on the dog-cart seat it would have been the larkish freak of a school-girl: if she did it to-day—as per invitation presumably of Lady Macmaster, bringing them together, for, of course, it could not be performed from a distance or without correspondence—No, communication!... If, then, she did it to-day... to-day... to-day—the Eleven Eleven!—Oh, what a day to-day would be.... Not her sentiments those; quotations from Christina, sister of Lady Macmaster's favourite poet.... Or, perhaps, since she had had a title she would have found poets more... more chic!

The poet who was killed at Gallipoli . . . Gerald Osborne, was it? Couldn't remember the name!

But for six years then she had been a member of that . . . triangle. You couldn't call it a *ménage à trois*, even if you didn't know French. They hadn't lived together! . . . They had d——d near died together when the general's car hit their dog-cart! D——d near! (You *must* not use those Wartime idioms. *Do* break yourself of it! Remember the maroons!)

An oafish thing to do! To take a school-girl, just . . . oh, just past the age of consent, out all night in a dog-cart and then get yourself run into by the car of the V.C., P.G., champion-in-red-trouser-stripe of your Legitimate! You'd think any man who *was* a man would have avoided that!

Most men knew enough to know that the Woman Pays . . . the school-girl too!

But they get it both ways. . . . Look here: when Edith Ethel Duchemin, then, just—or perhaps not quite, Lady Macmaster! At any rate, her husband was dead and she had just married that miserable little. . . . (Mustn't use that word!) She, Valentine Wannop, had been the only witness of the marriage—as of the previous, discreet, but so praise-worthy adultery! . . . When, then, Edith Ethel had. . . . It must have been on the very day of the knighthood, because Edith Ethel made it an excuse not to ask her to the resultant Party. . . . Edith Ethel had accused her of having had a baby by . . . oh, Mr So and So. . . . And heaven was her, Valentine Wannop's, witness that, although Mr So and So was her mother's constant adviser, she, Valentine Wannop, was still in such a state of acquaintance with him that she still called him by his surname. . . . When Lady Macmaster, spitting like the South American beast of burden called a llama, had accused her of having had a baby by her mother's adviser—to her natural astonishment, but, of course, it had been the result of the dog-cart and the motor and the General, and the general's sister, Lady Pauline Something—or perhaps it was Claudine? Yes,

Lady Claudine!—who had been in the car and the Society Wife, who was always striding along the railings of the Row. . . . When she had been so accused out of the blue, her first thought—and, confound it, her enduring thought!—had not been concern for her own reputation but for *his*. . . .

That was the *quality* of his entanglements, their very essence. He got into appalling messes, unending and unravellable—no, she meant *ununravellable*!—messes and other people suffered for him whilst he mooned on—into more messes! The General charging the dog-cart was symbolical of him. He was perfectly on his right side and all, but it was like him to be in a dog-cart when flagitious automobiles carrying Generals were running amuck! Then . . . the Woman Paid! . . . She really did, in this case. It had been her mother's horse they had been driving and, although they had got damages out of the General, the costs were twice that. . . . And her, Valentine's, reputation had suffered from being in a dog-cart at dawn, alone with a man. . . . It made no odds that he had—or was it hadn't?—'insulted' her in any way all through that—oh, that delicious delirious night. . . . She had to be said to have a baby by him, and then she had to be dreadfully worried about *his* poor old reputation. . . . Of course it would have been pretty rotten of him—she so young and innocent, daughter of so preposterously eminent, if so impoverished a man, his father's best friend and all. 'He hadn't oughter'er done it!' He hadn't really oughter. . . . She heard them all saying it, still!

Well, he hadn't! . . . But she?

That magic night. It was just before dawn, the mists nearly up to their necks as they drove; the sky going pale in a sort of twilight. And one immense star! She remembered only one immense star, though, historically, there had been also a dilapidated sort of moon. But the star was *her* best boy—what her wagon was hitched on to. . . . And they had been quoting—quarrelling over, she remembered:

'*Flebis et arsuro me, Delia, lecto
Tristibus et. . .*'

She exclaimed suddenly:

'Sunset and evening star
And one clear call for me
And may there be no moaning at the bar
When I . . .'

She said:

'Oh, but you *oughtn't* to, my dear! That's *Tennyson*!' Tennyson, with a difference!

She said:

'All the same, that would have been an inexperienced school-girl's prank. . . . But if I let him kiss me now I should be. . . .' She would be a what was it . . . a fornicatress? . . . *trix*! Fornicatrix is preferable! Very preferable. Then why not adultrix? You couldn't: you had to be a 'cold-blooded adultress!' or morality was not avenged.

Oh; but surely not cold-blooded! . . . Deliberate, then! . . . That wasn't, either, the word for the process. Of osculation! . . . Comic things, words, as applied to states of feelings!

But if she went now to Lincoln's Inn and the Problem held out its arms. . . . That would be 'Deliberate'. It would be asking for it in the fullest sense of the term.

She said to herself quickly:

'This way madness lies!' And then:

'What an imbecile thing to say!'

She had had an Affair with a man, she made her mind say to her, two years ago. That was all right. There could not be a, say, a schoolmistress rising twenty-four or twenty-five, in the world who hadn't had *some* affair, even if it were no more than a gentleman in a tea-shop who every afternoon for a week had gazed at her disrespectfully over a slice of plum-cake. . . . And then disappeared. . . . But you had to have had at least a might-have-been or you couldn't go on being a schoolmistress or a girl in a ministry

or a dactylographer of respectability. You packed *that* away in the bottom of your mind and on Sunday mornings before the perfectly insufficient Sunday dinner, you took it out and built castles in Spain in which you were a castanetted heroine turning on wonderful hips, but casting behind you inflaming glances. . . . Something like that!

Well, she had had an affair with this honest, simple creature! So good! So unspeakably GOOD. . . . Like the late Albert, prince consort! The very, helpless, immobile sort of creature that she ought not to have tempted. It had been like shooting tame pigeons! Because he had had a Society wife always in the illustrated papers whilst he sat at home and evolved Statistics or came to tea with her dear, tremendous, distracted mother, whom he helped to get her articles accurate. So a woman tempted him and he did. . . . No; he didn't quite eat!

But why? . . . Because he was GOOD?

Very likely!

Or was it—that was the intolerable thought that she shut up within her along with the material for castles in the air!—was it because he had been really indifferent?

They had revolved round each other at tea-parties—or rather he had revolved around her, because at Edith Ethel's affairs she always sat, a fixed starlet, behind the tea-urn and dispensed cups. But he would moon round the room, looking at the backs of books; occasionally laying down the law to some guest; and always drifting in the end to her side where he would say a trifle or two. . . . And the beautiful—the quite excruciatingly beautiful wife—striding along the Row with the second son of the Earl of someone at her side. . . . Asking for it. . . .

So it had been from the 1/7/12, say to the 4/8/14!

After that, things had become more rubbled—mixed up with alarums. Excursions on his part to unapproved places. And trouble. He was quite damnably in trouble. With his Superiors; with, so unnecessarily, Hun projectiles, wire, mud; over Money; politics; mooning on without a good word from anyone. . . . Unravellable muddles that never got

unravelling but that somehow got you caught up in them. . . .

Because he needed her moral support! When, during the late Hostilities, he hadn't been out there, he had drifted to the tea-table much earlier of an afternoon and stayed beside it much longer: till after everyone else had gone and they could go and sit on the tall fender side by side, and argue . . . about the rights and wrongs of the War!

Because she was the only soul in the world with whom he could talk. . . . They had the same sort of good, bread-and-butter brains; without much of the romantic. . . . No doubt a touch . . . in him. Otherwise he would not have always been in these muddles. He gave all he possessed to anyone who asked for it. That was all right. But that those who sponged on him should also involve him in intolerable messes. . . . That was not proper. One ought to defend oneself against that!

Because . . . if you do not defend yourself against that, look how you let in your nearest and dearest—those who have to sympathise with you in your confounded troubles whilst you moon on, giving away more and more and getting into more troubles! In this case it was she who was his Nearest and Dearest. . . . Or had been!

At that her nerves suddenly got the better of her and her mind went mad. . . . Supposing that that fellow, from whom she had not heard for two years, *hadn't* now communicated with her. . . . Like an ass she had taken it for granted that he had *asked* Lady . . . Blast her! . . . to 'bring them together again'! But she imagined that even Edith Ethel would not have had the cheek to ring her up if he hadn't asked her to!

But she had nothing to go on. . . . Feeble, over-sexed ass that she was, she had let her mind jump at once to the conclusion, the moment the mere mention of him seemed implied—jump to the conclusion that he was asking her again to come and be his mistress. . . . Or nurse him through his present muddle till he should be fit to. . . .

Mind, she did not say that she would have succumbed.

But if she had not jumped at the idea that it was he, really, speaking through Edith Ethel, she would never have permitted her mind to dwell on . . . on his blasted, complacent perfections!

Because she had taken it for granted that if he had had her rung up he would not have been monkeying with other girls during the two years he hadn't written to her. . . . Ah, but hadn't he?

Look here! *Was* it reasonable? Here was a fellow who had all but . . . all BUT . . . 'taken advantage of her' one night just before going out to France, say, two years ago. . . . And not another word from him after that! . . . It was all very well to say that he was portentous, looming, luminous, loony: John Peel with his coat so grey, the English Country Gentleman *pur sang* and then some; saintly; Godlike, Jesus-Christ-like. . . . He was all that. But you don't seduce, as near as can be, a young woman and then go off to Hell, leaving her, God knows, in Hell, and not so much as send her, in two years, a picture-postcard with MIZPAH on it. You don't. You don't!

Or if you do you have to have your character revised. You have to have it taken for granted that you were only monkeying with her and that you've been monkeying ever since with WAACS in Rouen or some other Base. . . .

Of course, if you ring your young woman up when you come back . . . or have her rung up by a titled lady. . . . That might restore you in the eyes of the world, or at least in the eyes of the young woman if she was a bit of a softie. . . .

But *had* he? Had he? It was absurd to think that Edith Ethel hadn't had the face to do it unasked! To save three thousand two hundred pounds, not to mention interest—which was what Vincent owed *him*!—Edith Ethel with the sweetest possible smile would beg the pillows off a whole hospital ward full of dying. . . . She was quite right. She had to save her man. You go to any depths of ignominy to save your man.

But that did not help her, Valentine Wannop!

She sprang off the bench; she clenched her nails into her palms; she stamped her thin-soled shoes into the coke-brize floor that was singularly unresilient. She exclaimed:

'Damn it all, he didn't ask her to ring me up. He didn't ask her. He didn't ask her to!' still stamping about.

She marched straight at the telephone that was by now uttering long, tinny, night-jar's calls and, with one snap, pulled up the receiver right off the twisted green-blue cord. . . . Broke it! With incidental satisfaction!

Then she said:

'Steady the Buffs!' not out of repentance for having damaged School Property, but because she was accustomed to call her thoughts The Buffs because of their practical unromantic character as a rule. . . . A fine regiment, the Buffs!

Of course, if she had not broken the telephone she could have rung up Edith Ethel and have asked her whether he had or hadn't asked to . . . to be brought together again. . . . It was like her, Valentine Wannop, to smash the only means of resolving a torturing doubt. . . .

It wasn't, really, in the least like her. *She* was practical enough: none of the 'under the ban of fatality' business about her. She had smashed the telephone because it had been like smashing a connection with Edith Ethel; or because she hated tinny night-jars; or because she had smashed it. For nothing in the world; for nothing, nothing, nothing in the world would she ever ring up Edith Ethel and ask her:

'Did *he* put you up to ringing me up?'

That would be to let Edith Ethel come between their intimacy.

A subconscious volition was directing her feet towards the great doors at the end of the Hall, varnished, pitch-pine doors of Gothic architecture; economically decorated as if with straps and tin-lids of Brunswick-blackened cast iron.

She said:

'Of course if it's the wife who has removed his furniture

that would be a reason for his wanting to get into communication. They would have split. . . . But he does not hold with a man divorcing a woman, and she won't divorce.'

As she went through the sticky postern—all that wood-work seemed sticky on account of its varnish!—beside the great doors she said:

'Who cares!'

The great thing was . . . but she could not formulate what the great thing was. You had to settle the preliminaries.

III

She said eventually to Miss Wanostrocht who had sat down at her table behind two pink carnations:

'I didn't consciously want to bother you but a spirit in my feet has led me who knows how. . . . That's Shelley, isn't it?'

And indeed a quite unconscious but shrewd mind had pointed out to her whilst still in the School Hall and even before she had broken the telephone, that Miss Wanostrocht very probably would be able to tell her what she wanted to know and that if she didn't hurry she might miss her, since the Head would probably go now the girls were gone. So she had hurried through gauntish corridors whose Decorated Gothic windows positively had bits of pink glass here and there interspersed in their lattices. Nevertheless a nearly deserted, darkish, locker-lined dressing-room being a short cut, she had paused in it before the figure of a clumsyish girl, freckled, in black and, on a stool, desultorily lacing a dull black boot, an ankle on her knee. She felt an impulse to say: 'Good-bye, Pettigul!' she didn't know why.

The clumsy, fifteenish, bumpy-faced girl was a symbol of that place—healthyish, but not over healthy; honestish but with no craving for intellectual honesty; big-boned in

unexpected places . . . and uncomelily blubbering so that her face appeared dirtyish. . . . It was in fact all 'ishes' about that Institution. They were all healthyish, honestish, clumsyish, twelve-to-eighteenish and big-boned in unexpected places because of the late insufficient feeding. . . . Emotionalish, too; apt to blubber rather than to go into hysterics.

Instead of saying good-bye to the girl she said :

'Here!' and roughly, since she was exhibiting too much leg, pulled down the girl's shortish skirt and set to work to lace the unyielding boot on the unyielding shin-bone. . . . After a period of youthful bloom, which would certainly come and as certainly go, this girl would, normally, find herself one of the Mothers of Europe, marriage being due to the period of youthful bloom. . . . Normally that is to say according to a normality that that day might restore. Of course it mightn't!

A tepid drop of moisture fell on Valentine's right knuckle.

'My cousin Bob was killed the day before yesterday,' the girl's voice said above her head. Valentine bent her head still lower over the boot with the patience that, in educational establishments, you must, if you want to be business-like and shrewd, acquire and display in face of unusual mental vagaries. . . . This girl had never had a cousin Bob, or anything else. Pettigul and her two sisters, Pettiguls Two and Three, were all in that Institution at extremely reduced rates precisely because they had not got, apart from their widowed mother, a discoverable relative. The father, a half-pay major, had been killed early in the war. All the mistresses had had to hand in reports on the moral qualities of the Pettiguls, so all the mistresses had this information.

'He gave me his puppy to keep for him before he went out,' the girl said. 'It doesn't seem just!'

Valentine, straightening herself, said :

'I should wash my face if I were you, before I went out.

Or you might get yourself taken for a German!’ She pulled the girl’s clumsyish blouse straight on her shoulders.

‘Try,’ she added, ‘to imagine that you’ve got someone just come back! It’s just as easy and it will make you look more attractive!’

Scurrying along the corridors she said to herself:

‘Heaven help me, does it make *me* look more attractive?’

She caught the Head, as she had anticipated, just on the point of going to her home in Fulham, an unattractive suburb but near a bishop’s palace nevertheless. It seemed somehow appropriate. The lady was episcopally-minded but experienced in the vicissitudes of suburban children: very astonishing some of them unless you took them very much in the lump.

The Head had stood behind her table for the first three questions and answers, in an attitude of someone who is a little at bay, but she had sat down just before Valentine had quoted Shelley at her, and she had now the air of one who is ready to make a night of it. Valentine continued to stand.

‘This,’ Miss Wanostrocht said very gently, ‘is a day on which one might . . . take steps . . . that might influence one’s whole life.’

‘That’s,’ Valentine answered, ‘exactly why I’ve come to you. I want to know what that woman said to you so as to know where I stand before I take a step.’

The Head said:

‘I had to let the girls go. I don’t mind saying that you are very valuable to me. The Governors—I had an express from Lord Boulnois—ordered them to be given a holiday to-morrow. It’s very inconsistent. But that makes it all the . . .’

She stopped. Valentine said to herself:

‘By Jove, I don’t know anything about men; but how little I know about women. What’s she getting at?’

She added:

‘She’s nervous. She must be wanting to do something she thinks I won’t like!’

She said chivalrously:

'I don't believe anybody could have kept those girls in to-day. It's a thing one has no experience of. There's never been a day like this before.'

Out there in Piccadilly there would be seething mobs shoulder to shoulder: she had never seen the Nelson column stand out of a solid mass. They might roast oxen whole in the Strand: Whitechapel would be seething, enamelled iron advertisements looking down on millions of bowler hats. All sordid and immense London stretched out under her gaze. She felt herself of London as the grouse feels itself of the heather, and there she was in an emptied suburb looking at two pink carnations. Dyed probably: offering of Lord Boulnois to Miss Wanostrocht! You never saw a natural-grown carnation that shade!

She said:

'I'd be glad to know what that woman—Lady Macmaster—told you.'

Miss Wanostrocht looked down at her hands. She had the little-fingers hooked together, the hands back to back; it was a demoded gesture. . . . Girton of 1897, Valentine thought. Indulged in by the thoughtfully blonde. . . . Fair girl graduates the sympathetic comic papers of those days had called them. It pointed to a long sitting. Well, she, Valentine, was not going to brusque the issue! . . . French-derived expression that. But how would you put it otherwise?

Miss Wanostrocht said:

'I sat at the feet of your father!'

'You see!' Valentine said to herself. 'But she must then have gone to Oxford, not Newnham!' She could not remember whether there had been women's colleges at Oxford as early as 1895 or 1897. There must have been.

'The greatest Teacher. . . . The greatest influence in the world,' Miss Wanostrocht said.

It was queer, Valentine thought: this woman had known all about her—at any rate all about her distinguished descent all the time she, Valentine, had been

Physical Instructress at that Great Public School (Girls'). Yet except for an invariable courtesy such as she imagined Generals might show to non-commissioned officers, Miss Wanostrocht had hitherto taken no more notice of her than she might have taken of a superior parlourmaid. On the other hand she had let Valentine arrange her physical training exactly as she liked: without any interference.

'We used to hear,' Miss Wanostrocht, said, 'how he spoke Latin with you and your brother from the day of your births. . . . He used to be regarded as eccentric, but how *right*! . . . Miss Hall says that you are the most remarkable Latinist she has ever so much as imagined.'

'It's not true,' Valentine said, 'I can't *think* in Latin. You cannot be a real Latinist unless you do that. He did of course.'

'It was the last thing you would think of him as doing,' the Head answered with a pale gleam of youth. 'He was such a thorough man of the world. So awake!'

'We ought to be a queer lot, my brother and I,' Valentine said. 'With such a father . . . And mother of course!'

Miss Wanostrocht said:

'Oh . . . your *mother*. . . .'

And immediately Valentine conjured up the little, adorning female clique of Miss Wanostrocht's youth, all spying on her father and mother in their walks under the Oxford Sunday trees, the father so jaunty and awake, the mother so trailing, large, generous, unobservant. And all the little clique saying: If only he had *us* to look after him. . . . She said with a little malice:

'You don't read my mother's novels, I suppose. . . . It was she who did all my father's writing for him. He couldn't write, he was too impatient!'

Miss Wanostrocht exclaimed:

'Oh, you *shouldn't* say that!' with almost the pain of someone defending her own personal reputation.

'I don't see why I shouldn't,' Valentine said. 'He was the first person to say it about himself.'

'He shouldn't have said it either,' Miss Wanostrocht

answered with a sort of soft unction. 'He should have taken care more of his own reputation for the sake of his Work!'

Valentine considered this thin, ecstatic spinster with ironic curiosity.

'Of course, if you've sat... if you're still sitting at father's feet as much as all that,' she conceded, 'it gives you a certain right to be careful about his reputation.... All the same I wish you would tell me what that person said on the phone!'

The bust of Miss Wanostrocht moved with a sudden eagerness towards the edge of her table.

'It's precisely because of that,' she said, 'that I want to speak to you first.... That I want you to consider....'

Valentine said:

'Because of my father's reputation.... Look here, did that person—Lady Macmaster!—speak to you as if you were me? Our names are near enough to make it possible.'

'You're,' Miss Wanostrocht said, 'as one might say, the fine fruit of the product of his views on the education of women. And if you... It's been such a satisfaction to me to observe in you such a... a sound, instructed head on such a... oh, you know, sane body.... And then.... An earning capacity. A commercial value. Your father, of course, never minced words....' She added:

'I'm bound to say that my interview with Lady Macmaster... Who surely isn't a lady of whom you could say that you disapprove. I've read her husband's work. It surely—you'd say, wouldn't you?—conserves some of the ancient fire.'

'He,' Valentine said, 'hasn't a word of Latin to his tail. He makes his quotations out, if he uses them, by means of school-cribs.... I know his method of work, you know.'

It occurred to Valentine to think that if Edith Ethel really *had* at first taken Miss Wanostrocht for herself there might pretty obviously be some cause for Miss Wanostrocht's concern for her father's reputation as an intimate trainer of young women. She figured Edith Ethel suddenly

bursting into a description of the circumstances of that man who was without furniture and did not appear to recognize the porter. The relations she might have described as having existed between her and him might well worry the Head of a Great Public School for Middle Class Girls. She had no doubt been described as having had a baby. A disagreeable and outraged current invaded her feelings. . . .

It was suddenly obscured by a recrudescence of the thought that had come to her only incidentally in the hall. It rushed over her with extraordinary vividness now, like a wave of warm liquid. . . . If it *had* really been that fellow's wife who had removed his furniture what *was* there to keep them apart? He couldn't have pawned or sold or burnt his furniture whilst he had been with the British Expeditionary Force in the Low Countries! He couldn't have without extraordinary difficulty! Then . . . What *should* keep them apart? . . . Middle Class Morality? A pretty gory carnival that had been for the last four years! Was this then Lent, pressing hard on the heels of Saturnalia? Not so hard as that, surely! So that if one hurried. . . . What on earth did she want, unknown to herself?

She heard herself saying, almost with a sob, so that she was evidently in a state of emotion:

'Look here: I disapprove of this whole thing: of what my father has brought me to! Those people . . . the brilliant Victorians talked all the time through their hats. They evolved a theory from anywhere and then went brilliantly mad over it. Perfectly recklessly. . . . Have you noticed Pettigul One? . . . Hasn't it occurred to you that you *can't* carry on violent physical jerks and mental work side by side? I ought not to be in this school and I ought not to be what I am!'

At Miss Wanostrocht's perturbed expression she said to herself:

'What on earth am I saying all this for? You'd think I was trying to cut loose from this school! Am I?'

Nevertheless her voice was going on:

'There's too much oxygenation of the lungs, here. It's unnatural. It affects the brain, deleteriously. Pettigul One is an example of it. She's earnest with me and earnest with her books. Now she's gone dotty. Most of them it only stupifies.'

It was incredible to her that the mere imagination that that fellow's wife had left him should make her spout out like this—for all the world like her father spouting out one of his ingenious theories! . . . It had really occurred to her once or twice to think that you could not run a dual physical and mental existence without some risk. The military physical developments of the last four years had been responsible for a real exaggeration of physical values. She was aware that in that Institution, for the last four years, she had been regarded as supplementing if not as actually replacing both the doctor and the priest. . . . But from that to evolving a complete theory that the Pettigul's lie was the product of an over-oxygenated brain was going pretty far. . . .

Still, she was prevented from taking part in national rejoicings; pretty certainly Edith Ethel had been talking scandal about her to Miss Wanostrocht. She had the right to take it out in some sort of exaggerated declamation!

'It appears,' Miss Wanostrocht said, 'for we can't now go into the question of the whole curriculum of the school, though I am inclined to agree with you. What by the bye is the matter with Pettigul One? I thought her rather a solid sort of girl. But it appears that the wife of a friend . . . perhaps it's only a former friend of yours, is in a nursing home.'

Valentine exclaimed:

'Oh, he. . . . But that's too ghastly!'

'It appears,' Miss Wanostrocht said, 'to be rather a mess.' She added: 'That appears to be the only expression to use.'

For Valentine, that piece of news threw a blinding light upon herself. She was overwhelmingly appalled because

that woman was in a nursing home. Because in that case it would not be sporting to go and see the husband!

Miss Wanostrocht went on:

'Lady Macmaster was anxious for your advice. . . . It appears that the only other person that could look after the interests of . . . of your friend: his brother. . . .'

Valentine missed something out of that sentence. Miss Wanostrocht talked too fluently. If people wanted you to appreciate items of sledge-hammering news they should not use long sentences. They should say:

'He's mad and penniless. His brother's dying: his wife's just been operated on.' Like that! Then you could take it in; even if your mind was rioting about like a cat in a barrel.

'The brother's . . . female companion,' Miss Wanostrocht was wandering on, 'though it appears that she would have been willing is therefore not available. . . . The theory is that he—he himself, your friend, has been considerably unhinged by his experiences in the war. Then . . . Who in your opinion should take the responsibility of looking after his interests?'

Valentine heard herself say:

'Me!'

She added:

'Him! Looking after him. I don't know that he has any . . . interests!'

He didn't appear to have any furniture, so how could he have the other things? She wished Miss Wanostrocht would leave off using the word 'appear'. It was irritating. . . . and infectious. Could the lady not make a direct statement? But then, no one ever made clear statements, and this no doubt appeared to that anaemic spinster a singularly tenebrous affair.

As for clear statements. . . . If there had ever been any in precisely this tenebrous mess she, Valentine, would know how she stood with that man's wife. For it was part of the preposterous way in which she herself and all her friends behaved that they never made clear statements—except for

Edith Ethel who had the nature of a female costermonger and could not tell the truth, though she could be clear enough. But even Edith Ethel had never hitherto said anything about the way the wife in this case treated the husband. She had given Valentine very clearly to understand that she 'sided' with the wife—but she had never gone as far as to say that the wife was a good wife. If she—Valentine—could only know that.

Miss Wanostrocht was asking:

'When you say "Me", do you mean that you would propose to look after that man yourself? I trust not.'

.... Because, obviously, if she were a good wife, she, Valentine, couldn't butt in...not generously. As her father's and still more her mother's daughter.... On the face of it you would say that a wife who was always striding along the palings of the Row, or the paths of other resorts of the fashionable could not be a good—a domestic—wife for a Statistician. On the other hand he was a pretty smart man, Governing class, county family and the rest of it—so he might like his wife to figure in Society: he might even exact it. He was quite capable of that. Why, for all she knew, the wife might be a retiring, shy person whom he thrust out into the hard world. It was not likely: but it was as possible as anything else.

Miss Wanostrocht was asking:

'Aren't there Institutions... Military Sanatoria... for cases precisely like that of this Captain Tietjens? It appears to be the war that has broken him down, not merely evil living.'

'It's precisely,' Valentine said, 'because of that that one should want... shouldn't one... Because it's because of the War...'

The sentence would not finish itself.

Miss Wanostrocht said:

'I thought.... It has been represented to me... that you were a Pacifist. Of an extreme type!'

It had given Valentine a turn—like the breaking out of sweat in a case of fever—to hear the name, coldly: 'Captain

Tietjens,' for it was like a release. She had been irrationally determined that hers should not be the first tongue to utter that name.

And apparently from her tone Miss Wanostrocht was prepared to detest that Captain Tietjens. Perhaps she detested him already.

She was beginning to say:

'If one is an extreme Pacifist because one cannot bear to think of the sufferings of men, isn't that a precise reason why one should wish that a poor devil, all broken up . . .'

But Miss Wanostrocht had begun one of her own long sentences. Their voices went on together, like trains dragging along ballast—disagreeably, Miss Wanstrocht's organ, however, won out with the words:

' . . . behaved very badly indeed.'

Valentine said hotly:

'You ought not to believe anything of the sort—on the strength of anything said by a woman like Lady Macmaster.'

Miss Wanostrocht appeared to have been brought to a complete stop: she leaned forward in her chair; her mouth was a little open. And Valentine said: 'Thank Goodness!' to herself.

She had to have a moment to herself to digest what had the air of being new evidence of the baseness of Edith Ethel; she felt herself to be infuriated in regions of her own being that she hardly knew. That seemed to her to be a littleness in herself. She had not thought that she had been at little as that. It ought not to matter what people said of you. She was perfectly accustomed to think of Edith Ehel as telling whole crowds of people very bad things about her, Valentine Wannop. But there was about this a recklessness that was hardly believable. To tell an unknown person, encountered by chance on the telephone, derogatory facts about a third party who might be expected to come to the telephone herself in a minute or two—and, not only that—who must in all probability hear what had been said very soon after, from the first listener. . . . That was surely a

recklessness of evil-speaking that almost outpassed sanity. . . . Or else it betrayed a contempt for her, Valentine Wanon, and what she could do in the way of reprisals that was extremely hard to bear!

She said suddenly to Miss Wanostrocht:

'Look here! Are you speaking to me as a friend to my father's daughter or as a Headmistress to a Physical Instructor?'

A certain amount of blood came into the lady's pinkish features. She had certainly been ruffled when Valentine had permitted her voice to sound so long alongside her own; for, although Valentine knew next to nothing about the Head's likes or dislikes she had once or twice before seen her evince marked distaste on being interrupted in one of her formal sentences.

Miss Wanostrocht said with a certain coldness:

'I'm speaking at present. . . . I'm allowing myself the liberty—as a much older woman—in the capacity of a friend of your father. I have been, in short, trying to recall to you all that you owe to yourself as being an example of his training!'

Involuntarily Valentine's lips formed themselves for a low whistle of incredulity. She said to herself:

'By Jove! I am in the middle of a nasty affair. . . . This is a sort of professional cross-examination.'

'I am in a way glad,' the lady was now continuing, 'that you take that line. . . . I mean of defending Mrs Tietjens with such heat against Lady Macmaster. Lady Macmaster appears to dislike Mrs Tietjens, but I am bound to say that she appears to be in the right of it. I mean of her dislike. Lady Macmaster is a serious personality, and even on her public record Mrs Tietjens appears to be very much the reverse. No doubt you wish to be loyal to your . . . friends, but . . .'

'We appear,' Valentine said, 'to be getting into an extraordinary muddle.'

She added:

'I haven't, as you seem to think, been defending Mrs

Tietjens. I would have. I would at any time. I have always thought of her as beautiful and kind. But I heard you say the words: "*has been behaving very badly*," and I thought you meant that Captain Tietjens had. I denied it. If you meant that his wife has, I deny it, too. She's an admirable wife . . . and mother . . . that sort of thing, for all I know. . . .'

She said to herself:

'Now why do I say that? What's Hecuba to me?' and then:

'It's to defend *his* honour, of course . . . I'm trying to present Captain Tietjens as English Country Gentleman complete with admirably arranged establishment, stables, kennels, spouse, offspring . . . That's a queer thing to want to do!'

Miss Wanostrocht who had breathed deeply said now:

'I'm extremely glad to hear that. Lady Macmaster certainly said that Mrs Tietjens was—let us say—at least a neglectful wife. . . . Vain, you know; idle; overdressed. . . . All that . . . And you appeared to defend Mrs Tietjens.'

'She's a smart woman in smart Society,' Valentine said, 'but it's with her husband's concurrence. She has a right to be. . . .'

'We shouldn't,' Miss Wanostrocht said, 'be in the extraordinary muddle to which you referred if you did not so continually interrupt me. I was trying to say that, for you, an inexperienced girl, brought up in a sheltered home, no pitfall could be more dangerous than a man with a wife who neglected her duties!'

Valentine said:

'You will have to excuse my interrupting you. It *is*, you know, rather more my funeral than yours.'

Miss Wanostrocht said quickly:

'You can't say that. You don't know how ardently. . . .'

Valentine said:

'Yes, yes. . . . Your *schwärm* for my father's memory and all. . . . But my father couldn't bring it about that I should lead a sheltered life. . . . I'm about as experienced as any

girl of the lower classes. . . . No doubt it was his doing, but don't make any mistakes.'

She added:

'Still, it's I that's the corpse. You're conducting the inquest. So it's more fun for you.'

Miss Wanostrocht had grown slightly pale:

'If; if . . . ' she stammered slightly, 'by "experience" you mean. . . .'

'I don't,' Valentine exclaimed, 'and you have no right to infer that I do on the strength of a conversation you've had, but shouldn't have had, with one of the worst tongues in London. . . . I mean that my father left us so that I had to earn my and my mother's living as a servant for some months after his death. That was what his training came to. But I can look after myself . . . In consequence. . . .'

Miss Wanostrocht had thrown herself back in her chair.

'But . . . ' she exclaimed: she had grown completely pale—like discoloured wax. 'There was a subscription. . . . We. . . . ' She began again: 'We knew that he hadn't. . . .'

'You subscribed,' Valentine said, 'to purchase his library and presented it to his wife . . . who had nothing to eat but what my wages as a tweeny maid got for her.' But before the pallor of the other lady she tried to add a touch of generosity: 'Of course the subscribers wanted, very naturally, to preserve as much as they could of his personality. A man's books are very much himself. That was all right.' She added: 'All the same I had that training: in a suburban basement. So you cannot teach me a great deal about the shady in life. I was in the family of a Middlesex County Councillor. In Ealing.'

Miss Wanostrocht said faintly:

'This is very dreadful!'

'It isn't really!' Valentine said. 'I wasn't badly treated as tweeny maids go. It would have been better if the Mistress hadn't been a constant invalid and the cook constantly drunk. . . . After that I did a little office work. For the suffragettes. That was after old Mr Tietjens came back from abroad and gave mother some work on a paper he owned.'

We scrambled along then, somehow. Old Mr Tietjens was father's greatest friend, so father's side, as you might say, turned up trumps—If you like to think that to console you. . . .’

Miss Wanostrocht was bending her face down over her table, presumably to hide a little of it from Valentine or to avoid the girl's eyes.

Valentine went on:

‘One knows all about the conflict between a man's private duties and his public achievements. But with a very little less of the flamboyant in his life my father might have left us very much better off. It isn't what I *want*—to be a cross between a sergeant in the army and an upper housemaid. Any more than I wanted to be an under one.’

Miss Wanostrocht uttered an ‘Oh!’ of pain. She exclaimed rapidly:

‘It was your moral rather than your mere athletic influence that made me so glad to have you here. . . . It was because I felt that you did not set such a high value on the physical. . . .’

‘Well, you aren't going to have me here much longer,’ Valentine said. ‘Not an instant more than I can in decency help. I'm going to. . . .’

She said to herself:

‘What on earth am I going to do? . . . What do I want?’

She wanted to lie in a hammock beside a blue, tideless sea and think about Tibullus. . . . There was no nonsense about her. She did not want to engage in intellectual pursuits herself. She had not the training. But she intended to enjoy the more luxurious forms of the intellectual products of others. . . . That appeared to be the moral of the day!

And, looking rather minutely at Miss Wanostrocht's inclined face, she wondered if, in the history of the world, there had ever been such another day. Had Miss Wanostrocht, for instance, ever known what it was to have a man come back? Ah, but amid the tumult of a million

other men coming back! A collective impulse to slacken off! Immense! Softening!

Miss Wanostrocht had apparently loved her father. No doubt in company with fifty damsels. Did they even get a collective kick out of that affair? It was even possible that she had spoken as she had . . . *pour cause*. Warning her, Valentine, against the deleterious effect of being connected with a man whose wife was unsatisfactory. . . . Because the fifty damsels had all, in duty bound, thought that her mother was an unsatisfactory wife for the brilliant, grey-black-haired Eminence with the figure of a stripling that her father had been. . . . They had probably thought that, without the untidy figure of Mrs Wannop as a weight upon him, he might have become. . . . Well, with one of *them*! . . . Anything! Any sort of figure in the councils of the nation. Why not Prime Minister? For along with his pedagogic theories he had had political occupations. He had certainly had the friendship of Disraeli. He supplied—it was historic!—materials for eternally famous, meretricious speeches. He would have been head-trainer of the Empire's pro-consuls if the other fellow, at Balliol, had not got in first. . . . As it was he had had to specialize in the Education of Women. Building up Primrose Dames. . . .

So Miss Wanostrocht warned her against the deleterious effect of neglected wives upon young, attached virgins! It probably *was* deleterious. Where would she, Valentine Wannop, have been by now if she had thought that Sylvia Tietjens was really a bad one!

Miss Wanostrocht said, as if with sudden anxiety:

'You are going to do what? You propose to do what?'

Valentine said:

'Obviously after your conversation with Edith Ethel you won't be so glad to have me here. My moral influence has not been brightened in aspect!' A wave of passionate resentment swept over her.

'Look here,' she said, 'if you think that I am prepared to. . . .'

She stopped, however. 'No,' she said, 'I am not going to

introduce the housemaid note. But you will probably see that this is irritating.' She added: 'I would have the case of Pettigul One looked into, if I were you. It might become epidemic in a big school like this. And we've no means of knowing where we stand nowadays!'

PART TWO

I

MONTHS and months before Christopher Tietjens had stood extremely wishing that his head were level with a particular splash of purposeless whitewash. Something behind his mind forced him to the conviction that, if his head—and of course the rest of his trunk and lower limbs—were suspended by a process of levitation to that distance above the duckboard on which, now, his feet were, he would be in an inviolable sphere. These waves of conviction recurred continually: he was constantly glancing aside and upwards at that splash: it was in the shape of the comb of a healthy rooster; it gleamed, with five serrations, in the just beginning light that shone along the thin, unroofed channel in the gravel slope. Wet half-light, just filtering; more visible there than in the surrounding desolation because the deep, narrow channel framed a section of just-illuminated rift in the watery eastwards!

Twice he had stood up on a rifleman's step enforced by a bully-beef case to look over—in the last few minutes. Each time, on stepping down again, he had been struck by that phenomenon: the light seen from the trench seemed if not brighter, then more definite. So, from the bottom of a pit-shaft in broad day you can see the stars. The wind was light, but from the North-West. They had there the weariness of a beaten army: the weariness of having to begin always new days again. . . .

He glanced aside and upwards: that cockscomb of phosphorescence. . . . He felt waves of some X force propelling his temples towards it. He wondered if perhaps the night

before he had not observed that that was a patch of reinforced concrete, therefore more resistant. He might of course have observed that and then forgotten it. He hadn't! It was therefore irrational.

If you are lying down under fire—flat under pretty smart fire—and you have only a paper bag in front of your head for cover you feel immeasurably safer than you do without it. You have a mind at rest. This must be the same thing.

It remained dark and quiet. It was forty-five minutes: it became forty-four . . . forty-three . . . Forty-two minutes and thirty seconds before a crucial moment and the slate grey cases of miniature metal pineapples had not come from the bothering place. . . . Who knew if there was anyone in charge there?

Twice that night he had sent runners back. No results yet. That bothering fellow might quite well have forgotten to leave a substitute. That was not likely. A careful man. But a man with a mania might forget. Still it was not likely! . . .

Thoughts menaced him as clouds threaten the heads of mountains, but for the moment they kept away. It was quiet; the wet cool air was agreeable. They had autumn mornings that felt like that in Yorkshire. The wheels of his physique moved smoothly; he was more free in the chest than he had been for months.

A single immense cannon at a tremendous distance said something. Something sulky. Aroused in its sleep and protesting. But it was not a signal to begin anything. Too heavy. Firing at something at a tremendous distance. At Paris, may be: or the North Pole: or the moon! They were capable of that, those fellows!

It would be a tremendous piece of frightfulness to hit the moon. Great gain in prestige. And useless. There was no knowing what they would not be up to, as long as it was stupid and useless. And, naturally boring. . . . And it was a mistake to be boring. One went on fighting to get rid of those bores—as you would to get rid of a bore in a club.

It was more descriptive to call what had spoken a cannon than a gun—though it was not done in the best local circles. It was all right to call 75's or the implements of the horse artillery "guns"; they were mobile and toy-like. But those immense things were cannons; the sullen muzzles always elevated. Sullen, like cathedral dignitaries or butlers. The thickness of barrel compared to the bore appeared enormous as they pointed at the moon, or Paris, or Nova Scotia.

Well, that cannon had not announced anything except itself! It was not the beginning of any barrage; our own fellows were not pooping off to shut it up. It had just announced itself, saying protestingly, 'CAN . . . NON,' and its shell roaring away to an enormous height caught the reflection of the unrisen sun on its base. A shining disc, like a halo in flight. . . . Pretty! A pretty motive for a decoration, tiny pretty planes up on a blue sky amongst shiny, flying haloes! Dragon flies amongst saints. . . . No, 'with angels and archangels!'. . . Well, one had seen it!

Cannon. . . . Yes, that was the right thing to call them. Like the up-ended, rusted things that stuck up out of parades when one had been a child.

No, not the signal for a barrage! A good thing! One might as well say 'Thank Goodness', for the later they began the less long it lasted. . . . Less long it lasted was ugly alliteration. Sooner it was over better. . . . No doubt half-past eight or at half-past eight to the stroke those boring fellows would let off their usual offering, probably plump, right on top of that spot. . . . As far as one could tell three salvoes of a dozen shells each at half-minute intervals between the salvoes. Perhaps salvoes was not the right word. Damn all artillery, anyhow!

Why did those fellows do it? Every morning at half-past eight; every afternoon at half-past two. Presumably just to show that they were still alive, and still boring. They were methodical. That was their secret. The secret of their boredom. Trying to kill them was like trying to shut up Liberals who would talk party politics in a non-political

club . . . had to be done, though! Otherwise the world was no place for . . . Oh, post-prandial naps! . . . Simple philosophy of the contest! . . . Forty minutes! And he glanced aside and upwards at the phosphorescent cockscomb! Within his mind something said that if he were only suspended up there. . . .

He stepped once more on to the rifle-step and on to the bully-beef case. He elevated his head cautiously: grey desolation sloped down and away. FRRRrrr! A gentle purring sound!

He was automatically back, on the duckboard, his break-fast hurting his chest. He said:

'By jove! I got the fright of my life!' A laugh was called for: he managed it, his whole stomach shaking. And cold!

A head in a metal pudding-basin—a Suffolk type of blonde head, pushed itself from a withdrawn curtain of sacking in the gravel wall beside him, at his back. A voice said with concern:

'There ain't no beastly snipers, is there, sir? I did 'ope there would'n be henny beastly snipers 'ere. It gives such a beastly lot of extra trouble warning the men.'

Tietjens said it was a beastly skylark that almost walked into his mouth. The Acting Sergeant-Major said with enthusiasm that them 'ere skylarks could fair scare the guts out of you. He remembered a raid in the dark, crawling on 'is 'ands 'n knees wen 'e put 'is 'and on a skylark on its nest. Never left 'is nest till 'is 'and was on 'im! Then it went up and fair scared the wind out of 'im. Cor! Never would 'e fergit that!

With an air of carefully pulling parcels out of a carrier's cart he produced from the cavern behind the sacking two blinking assemblages of tubular khaki-clad limbs. They wavered to erectness, pink cheeses of faces yawning beside tall rifles and bayonets. The Sergeant said:

'Keep yer 'eds down as you go along. You never knows!'

Tietjens told the Lance-Corporal of that party of two that his confounded gas-mask nozzle was broken. Hadn't he seen that for himself? The dismembered object bobbed

on the man's chest. He was to go and borrow another from another man and see the other drew a new one at once.

Tietjens' eyes were drawn aside and upwards. His knees were still weak. If he were levitated to the level of that thing he would not have to use his legs for support.

The elderly Sergeant went on with enthusiasm about skylarks. Wonderful the trust they showed in hus 'uman beens! Never left ther nesteses till you trod on them tho hall 'ell was rockin' around them. . . . An appropriate skylark from above and before the parapet made its shrill and heartless noise heard. No doubt the skylark that Tietjens had frightened—that had frightened him.

Therd bin, the Sergeant went on still enthusiastically, pointing a hand in the direction of the noise, skylarks singin' on the mornin' of every straf 'e'd ever bin in! Won'erful trust in yumanity! Won'erful hinstinck set in the fethered brest by the Halmighty! For oo was goin' to 'it a skylark on a battlefield!

The solitary Man drooped beside his long, bayoneted rifle that was muddied from stock to bayonet attachment. Tietjens said mildly that he thought the Sergeant had got his natural history wrong. He must divide the males from the females. The females sat on the nest through obstinate attachment to their eggs; the males obstinately soared above the nests in order to pour out abuse at other male skylarks in the vicinity.

He said to himself that he must get the doctor to give him a bromide. A filthy state his nerves had got into unknown to himself. The agitation communicated to him by that bird was still turning his stomach round. . . .

'Gilbert White of Selborne,' he said to the Sergeant, 'called the behaviour of the female STORGE: a good word for it.' But, as for trust in humanity, the Sergeant might take it that larks never gave us a thought. We were part of the landscape and if what destroyed their nests whilst they sat on them was a bit of H.E. shell or the coulter of a plough it was all one to them.

The Sergeant said to the re-joined Lance-Corporal whose box now hung correctly on his muddled chest:

'Now it's HAY post you gotter wait at!' They were to go along the trench and wait where another trench ran into it and there was a great A in whitewash on a bit of corrugated iron that was half-buried. 'You can tell a great HAY from a bull's foot as well as another, can't you, Corporal?' patiently.

Wen they Mills bombs come 'e was to send 'is Man into Hay Cumpny dugout fer a fatigue to bring 'em along 'ere, but Hay Cumpny could keep *is* little lot fer 'isself.

An if they Mills Bomb didn' come the Corporal'd better manufacture them on 'is own. An not make no mistakes!

The Lance-Corporal said 'Yes sargint, no sargint!' and the two went desultorily wavering along the duckboards, grey silhouettes against the wet bar of light, equilibrating themselves with hands on the walls of the trench.

'Ju 'eer what the orfcer said, Corporal,' the one said to the other. 'Wottever'll 'e say next! Skylarks not trust 'uman beens in battles! Cor!' The other grunted and, mournfully, the voices died out.

The cockscomb-shaped splash became of overwhelming interest momentarily to Tietjens; at the same time his mind began upon abstruse calculation of chances! Of his chances! A bad sign when the mind takes to doing that. Chances of direct hits by shells, by rifle bullets, by grenades, by fragments of shells or grenades. By any fragment of metal impinging on soft flesh. He was aware that he was going to be hit in the soft spot behind the collar-bone. He was conscious of that spot—the right-hand one; he felt none of the rest of his body. It is bad when the mind takes charge like that. A bromide was needed. The doctor must give him one. His mind felt pleasure at the thought of the M.O. A pleasant little fellow of the no account order that knows his job. And carried liquor cheerfully. Confoundedly cheerfully!

He saw the doctor—plainly! It was one of the plainest things he could see of this whole show—the doctor, a

slight figure, vault on to the parapet, like a vaulting horse for height; stand up in the early morning sun. . . . Blind to the world, but humming *Father O'Flynn*. And stroll in the sunlight, a swagger cane of all things in the world, under his arms, right straight over to the German trench. . . . Then throw his cap down into that trench. And walk back! Delicately avoiding the strands in the cut apron of wire that he had to walk through!

The doctor said he had seen a Hun—probably an officer's batman—cleaning a top-boot with an apron over his knees. The Hun had shied a boot brush at him and he had shied his cap at the Hun. The blinking Hun, he called him! No doubt the fellow had blinked!

No doubt you could do the unthinkable with impunity!

No manner of doubt: if you were blind drunk and all! . . . And however you strained, in an army you fell into routine. Of a quiet morning you do not expect drunken doctors strolling along your parapet. Besides, the German front lines were very thinly held. Amazingly! There might not have been a Hun with a gun within half a mile of that boot-black!

If he, Tietjens, stood in space, his head level with that cockscomb, he would be in an inviolable vacuum—as far as projectiles were concerned!

He was asking desultorily of the Sergeant whether he often shocked the men by what he said and the Sergeant was answering with blushes: Well, you do say things, sir! Not believing in skylarks now! If there was one thing the men believed hit was in the hinstincks of them little creatures!

'So that,' Tietjens said, 'they look at me as a sort of an atheist.'

He forced himself to look over the parapet again, climbing heavily to his place of observation. It was sheer impatience and purely culpable technically. But he was in command of the regiment, of an establishment of a thousand and eighteen men, or that used to be the Establishment of a battalion; of a strength of three hundred and

thirty-three. Say seventy-five per company. And two companies in command of second lieutenants, one just out. . . . The last four days. . . . There ought to be, say, eighty pairs of eyes surveying what he was going to survey. If there were fifteen it was as much as there were! . . . Figures were clean and comforting things. The chance against being struck by a shell-fragment that day, if the Germans came in any force, was fourteen to one against. There were battalions worse off than they. The sixth had only one one six left!

The tortured ground sloped down into mists. Say a quarter of a mile away. The German front lines were just shadows, like the corrugations of photographs of the moon: the paradoxes of our own trenches two nights ago! The Germans did not seem to have troubled to chuck up much in the way of parapets. They didn't. They were coming on. Anyhow they held their front lines very sparsely. . . . Was that the phrase? Was it even English?

Above the shadows the mist behaved tortuously: mounting up into umbrella shapes. Like snow-covered umbrella pines.

Disagreeable to force the eye to examine that mist. His stomach turned over. . . . That was the sacks. A flat, slightly disordered pile of wet sacks, half-right at two hundred yards. No doubt a shell had hit a G.S. wagon coming up with sacks for trenching. Or the bearers had bolted, chucking the sacks down. His eyes had fallen on that scattered pile four times already that morning. Each time his stomach had turned over. The resemblance to prostrate men was appalling. The enemy creeping up. . . . Christ! Within two hundred yards. So his stomach said. Each time, in spite of the preparation.

Otherwise the ground had been so smashed up that it was flat: went down into holes but did not rise up into mounds. That made it look gentle. It sloped down. To the untidiness. They appeared mostly to lie on their faces. Why? Presumably they were mostly Germans pushed back in the last counter-attack. Anyhow you saw mostly the

seats of their trousers. When you did not, how profound was their repose! You must phrase it a little like that—rhetorically. There was no other way to get the effect of that profoundness. Call it profundity!

It was different from sleep. Flatter. No doubt when the appalled soul left the weary body, the panting lungs. . . . Well, you can't go on with a sentence like that. . . . But you collapsed inwards. Like the dying pig they sold on trays in the street. Painter fellows doing battlefields never got that *intimate* effect. Intimate to them there. Unknown to the corridors in Whitehall. . . . Probably because they—the painters—drew from living models or had ideas as to the human form. . . . But these were not limbs, muscles, torsi. . . . Collections of tubular shapes in field-grey or mud-colour they were. Chucked about by Almighty God! As if He dropped them from on high to make them flatten into the earth. . . . Good gravel soil, that slope and relatively dry. No dew to speak of. The night had been covered. . . .

Dawn on the battlefield. . . . Damn it all, why sneer? It *was* dawn on the battlefield. . . . The trouble was that *this* battle was not over. By no means over. There would be a hundred and eleven years, nine months and twenty-seven days of it still. . . . No, you could not get the effect of that endless monotony of effort by numbers. Nor yet by saying 'Endless monotony of effort'. . . . It was like bending down to look into darkness of corridors under dark curtains. Under clouds. . . . Mist. . . .

At that, with dreadful reluctance his eyes went back to the spectral mists over the photographic shadows. He forced himself to put his glasses on the mists. They mopped and mowed, fantastically; grey, with black shadows; drooping like the dishevelled veils of murdered bodies. They were engaged in fantastic and horrifying layings out of corpses of vast dimensions; in silence but in accord they performed unthinkable tasks. They were the Germans. This was fear. This was the intimate fear of black quiet nights, in dugouts where you heard the obscene

suggestions of the miners' picks below you; tranquil, engrossed. Infinitely threatening. . . . But not FEAR.

It was in effect the desire for privacy. What he dreaded at those normal times when fear visited him at lunch; whilst seeing that the men got their baths or when writing, in a trench, in support, a letter to his bank-manager, was finding himself unhurt, surrounded by figures like the brothers of the Misericordia, going unconcerned about their tasks, noticing him hardly at all. . . . Whole hillsides, whole stretches of territory, alive with myriads of whitish-grey, long cagoules, with slits for eyeholes. Occasionally one would look at him through the eye-slits in the hoods. . . . The prisoner!

He would be the prisoner: liable to physical contacts—to being handled and being questioned. An invasion of his privacy!

As a matter of fact that wasn't so far out; not so dotty as it sounded. If the Huns got him—as they precious near had the night before last!—they would be—they had then been—in gas-masks of various patterns. They must be short of these things: but they looked, certainly, like goblin pigs with sore eyes, the hood with the askew, blind-looking eye-holes and the mouthpiece or the other nose attachment going down into a box, astonishingly like snouts! . . . Mopping and mowing—no doubt shouting through the masks!

They had appeared with startling suddenness and as if with a supernatural silence, beneath a din so overwhelming that you could not any longer bother to notice it. They were there, as it were, under a glass dome of silence that sheltered beneath that dark tumult, in the white illumination of Verrey lights that went on. They were there, those of them that had already emerged from holes—astonishingly alert hooded figures with the long rifles that always looked rather amateurish—though, Hell, they weren't. The hoods and the white light gave them the aspects of Canadian trappers in snow; made them no doubt look still more husky fellows as against our poor rats of Derby men. The heads of goblin pigs were emerging from shell-holes,

from rifts in the torn earth, from old trenches. . . . This ground had been fought over again and again. . . . Then the counter-attack had come through his, Tietjens', own crowd. One disorderly mob, as you might think, going through a disordered crowd that was damn glad to let them get through, realizing slowly, in the midst of a general not knowing what was going to happen, that the fellows were reliefs. They shot past you clumsily in a darkness spangled with shafts of light coming from God knows where and appeared going forward, whilst you at least had the satisfaction that, by order, you were going back. In an atmosphere of questioning. What was happening? What was going to happen? . . . What the bloody hell. . . . What. . . .

Tidy-sized shells began to drop among them saying: 'Wee . . . ee . . . ry. . . . Whack!' Some fellow showed Tietjens the way through an immense apron of wire that was beginning to fly about. He, Tietjens, was carrying a hell of a lot of paper folders and books. They ought to have evacuated an hour ago; or the Huns ought not to have got out of their holes for an hour. . . . But the Colonel had been too . . . too exalted. Call it too exalted. He was not going to evacuate for a pack of . . . Damn orders! . . . The fellow, McKechnie, had at last had to beg Tietjens to give the order. . . . Not that the order mattered. The men could not have held ten minutes longer. The ghostly Huns would have been in the trenches. But the Company Commanders knew that there was a Divisional Order to retire, and no doubt they had passed it on to their subalterns before getting killed. Still, that Bn. H.Q. should have given the order made it better even if there was no one to take it to the companies. It turned a practical expulsion into an officially strategic retreat. . . . And damn good divisional staff work at that. They had been fitted into beautiful, clean, new trenches, all ready for them—like chessmen fitting into their boxes. Damn good for a beaten army that was being forced off the face of the earth. Into the English Channel. . . . What made them stick it? What the devil made the men stick it? They were unbelievable.

There was a stroking on his leg. A gentle, timid, stroking! Well, he *ought* to get down: it was setting a bad example. The admirable trenches were perfectly efficiently fitted up with spy-holes. For himself he always disliked them. You thought of a rifle bullet coming smack through them and guided by the telescope into your right eye. Or perhaps you would not have a telescope. Anyhow you wouldn't know. . . .

There were still the three wheels, a-tilt, attached to slanting axles: in a haze of disintegrated wire, that, bedewed, made profuse patterns like frost on a window. There was their own apron—a perfect village!—of wire over which he looked. Fairly intact. The Germans had put up some of their own in front of the lost trenches, a quarter of a mile off: over the reposing untidinesses. In between there was a perfect maze: their own of the night before last. How the deuce had it not been *all* mashed to pieces by the last Hun barrage? Yet there were three frosty erections—like fairy sheds, half-way between the two lines. And, suspended in them, as there would have to be, three bundles of rags and what appeared to be a very large, squashed crow. How the devil had that fellow managed to get smashed into that shape? It was improbable. There was also—suspended, too, a tall melodramatic object, the head cast back to the sky. One arm raised in the attitude of, say, a Walter Scot Highland officer waving his men on. Waving a sword that wasn't there. . . . That was what wire did for you. Supported you in grotesque attitudes, even in death! The beastly stuff! The men said that was Lieutenant Constantine. It might well be. The night before last he, Tietjens, had looked round at all the officers that were in H.Q. dug-out, come for a last moment conference. He had speculated on which of them would be killed. Ghostly! Well, they had all been killed: and more on to that. But his premonition hadn't run to thinking that Constantine would get caught up in the wire. But perhaps it was not Constantine. Probably they would never know. The Huns would be where he stood by lunchtime. If the attack of

which Brigade H.Q. had warned them came off. But it mightn't. . . .

As a final salute to the on the whole not thrilling landscape, he wetted his forefinger by inserting it in his mouth and held it in the air. It was comfortingly chilly on the exterior, towards his back. Light airs were going right in the other fellows' faces. It might only be the dawn wind. But if it stiffened a very little or even held, those blessed Wurtembergers would never that day get out of their trenches. They couldn't come without gas. They were probably pretty well weakened, too. . . . You were not traditionally supposed to think much of Wurtembergers. Mild, dull creatures they were supposed to be. With funny hats. Good Lord! Traditions were going by the board!

He dropped down into the trench. The rather reddish soil with flakes of flint and little, pinkish nodules of pebbles was a friendly thing to face closely.

That sergeant was saying:

'You hadn't ought to do it, sir. Give me the creeps.' He added rather lachrymosely that they couldn't do without superior officers *altogether*. Odd creatures these Derby N.C.O.'s! They tried to get the tone of the old, time-serving N.C.O. They couldn't; all the same you couldn't say they weren't creditable achievements.

Yes, it was friendly, the trench face. And singularly unbellicose. When you looked at it you hardly believed that it was part of this affair. . . . Friendly! You felt at peace looking at its flints and pebbles. Like being in the butts up above Groby on the moor, waiting for the grouse to come over. The soil was not of course like those butts which were built of turfs. . . .

He asked, not so much for information, as to get the note of this fellow:

Why? What difference did it make whether there were senior officers or not? Anyone above eighteen would do, wouldn't they? They would keep on going on. It was a young man's war!

'It hasn't got that comfortable feeling, sir!' the Sergeant

expressed it. The young officers were very well for keeping you going through wire and barrages. But when you looked at them you didn't feel they knew so well what you were doing it for, if he might put it that way.

Tietjens said:

'Why? What are you doing it for?'

It wanted thirty-two minutes to the crucial moment. He said:

'Where are those bloody bombs?'

A trench cut in gravel wasn't, for all its friendly reddish-orange coloration, the ideal trench. Particularly against rifle-fire. There were rifts presumably alongside flakes of flint, that a rifle-bullet would get along. Still, the chances against a hit by a rifle-bullet were eighty thousand to one in a deep gravel trench like that. And he had had poor Jimmy Johns killed beside him by a bullet like that. So that gave him, say, 140,000 chances to one against. He wished his mind would not go on and on figuring. It did it whilst you weren't looking. As a well-trained dog will do when you tell it to stay in one part of a room and it prefers another. It prefers to do figuring. Creeps from the rug by the door to the hearth-rug, its eyes on your unconscious face. . . . That was what your mind was like. Like a dog!

The Sergeant said:

'They do say the first consignment of bombs was it n smashed. Hin a gully; well behind the line.' Another was coming down.

'Then you'd better whistle,' Tietjens said. 'Whistle for all you're worth.'

The Sergeant said:

'Fer a wind, sir? Keep the 'Uns beck, sir?'

Looking up at the whitewash cockscomb Tietjens lectured the sergeant on Gas. He always *had* said, and he said now, that the Germans had ruined themselves with their gas. . . .

He went on lecturing that Sergeant on gas. . . .

He considered his mind: it was alarming him. All through the war he had had one dread—that a wound, the

physical shock of a wound, would cause his mind to fail. He was going to be hit behind the collar-bone. He could feel the spot; not itching but the blood pulsing a little warmer. Just as you can become conscious of the end of your nose if you think about it!

The Sergeant said that 'e wished 'e could *feel* the Germans 'ad ruined themselves: they seemed to be drivin' us into the Channel. Tietjens gave his reasons. They were driving us. But not fast enough. Not fast enough. It was a race between our disappearance and their endurance. They had been hung up yesterday by the wind: they were as like as not going to be held up to-day. . . . They were not going fast enough. They could not keep it up.

The Sergeant said 'e wished, sir, you'd tell the men that. That was what the men ought to be told: not the stuff that was hin Divisional Comic Cuts and the 'ome pipers. . . .

A key-bugle of singular sweetness—at least Tietjens supposed it to be a key-bugle, for he knew the identities of practically no wind-instruments; it was certainly not a cavalry bugle, for there were no cavalry and even no Army Service Corps at all near—a bugle, then, of astounding sweetness made some remarks to the cool, wet dawn. It induced an astonishingly melting mood. He remarked:

'Do you mean to say, then, that your men, Sergeant, are really damned heroes? I suppose they are!'

He said 'your men', instead of 'our' or even 'the' men, because he had been till the day before yesterday merely the second-in-command—and was likely to be to-morrow again merely the perfectly inactive second-in-command of what was called a rag-time collection that was astonishingly a clique and mutely combined to regard him as an outsider. So he really regarded himself as rather a spectator; as if a railway passenger had taken charge of a locomotive whilst the engine-driver had gone to have a drink.

The Sergeant flushed with pleasure. 'Hit was,' he said, 'good to 'ave prise from Regular officers.' Tietjens said that he was not a Regular. The Sergeant stammered:

'Hain't you, sir, a Ranker? The men all thinks you are a promoted Ranker.'

No, Tietjens said, he was not a promoted Ranker. He added, after consideration, that he was a militia-man. The men would have, by the will of chance, to put up with his leadership for at least that day. They might as well feel as good about it as they could—as settled in their stomachs! It certainly made a difference that the men should feel assured about their officers: what exact difference there was no knowing. This crowd was not going to get any satisfaction out of being led by a 'gentleman'. They did not know what a gentleman was: a quite un-feudal crowd. Mostly Derby men. Small drapers, rate-collectors' clerks, gas-inspectors. There were even three music-hall performers, two scene shifters and several milkmen.

It was another tradition that was gone. Still, they desired the companionship of elder, heavier men who had certain knowledges. A militiaman probably filled the bill! Well, he was that, officially!

He glanced aside and upwards at the whitewash cockscomb. He regarded it carefully. And with amusement. He knew what it was that had made his mind take the particular turn it had insisted on taking. . . . The picks going in the dark under the H.Q. dugout in the Casse-noisette section. The men called it Crackerjack.

He had been all his life familiar with the idea of picks going in the dark, underground. There is no North Country man who is not. All through that country, if you awake at night you hear the sound, and always it appears supernatural. You know it is the miners, at the pit-face, hundreds and hundreds of feet down.

But just because it was familiar it was familiarly rather dreadful. Haunting. And the silence had come at a bad moment. After a perfect hell of noise; after so much of noise that he had been forced to ascend the slippery clay stairs of the dug-out. . . . And heaven knew if there was one thing that on account of his heavy-breathing chest he loathed, it was slippery clay . . . he had been forced to pant

up those slippery stairs. . . . His chest had been much worse, then . . . two months ago!

Curiosity had forced him up. And no doubt FEAR. The large battle fear; not the constant little, haunting misgivings. God knew! Curiosity or fear. In terrific noise; noise like the rushing up of innumerable noises determined not to be late, whilst the earth rocks or bumps or quakes or protests, you cannot be very coherent about your thoughts. So it might have been cool curiosity or it might have been sheer panic at the thought of being buried alive in that dug-out, its mouth sealed up. Anyhow, he had gone up from the dug-out where in his capacity of second-in-command, detested as an interloper by his C.O., he had sat ignominiously in that idleness of the second-in-command that it is in the power of the C.O. to inflict. He was to sit there till the C.O. dropped dead: then, however much the C.O. might detest him, to step into his shoes. Nothing the C.O. could do could stop that. In the meantime, as long as the C.O. existed the second-in-command must be idle; he would be given nothing to do. For fear he got kudos!

Tietjens flattered himself that he cared nothing about kudos. He was still Tietjens of Groby; no man could give him anything, no man could take anything from him. He flattered himself that he in no way feared death, pain, dishonour, the after-death, feared very little disease—except for choking sensations! . . . But his Colonel got in on him.

He had no disagreeable feelings, thinking of the Colonel. A good boy, as boys go: perfectly warranted in hating his second-in-command. . . . There are positions like that! But the fellow got in on him. He shut him up in that reeling cellar. And, of course, you might lose control of your mind in a reeling cellar where you cannot hear your thoughts. If you cannot hear your thoughts how the hell are you going to tell what your thoughts are doing?

You couldn't hear. There was an orderly with fever or shell-shock or something—a rather favourite orderly of the orderly room—asleep on a pile of rugs. Earlier in the night

Orderly Room had asked permission to dump the boy in there because he was making such a beastly row in his sleep that they could not hear themselves speak and they had a lot of paper work to do. They could not tell what had happened to the boy, whom they liked. The acting Sergeant-Major thought he must have got at some methylated spirits.

Immediately, that *strafe* had begun. The boy had lain, his face to the light of the lamp, on his pile of rugs—army blankets, that is to say. . . . A very blond boy's face, contorted in the strong light, shrieking—positively shrieking obscenities at the flame. But with his eyes shut. And two minutes after that *strafe* had begun you could see his lips move, that was all.

Well, he, Tietjens, had gone up. Curiosity or fear? In the trench you could see nothing and noise rushed like black angels gone mad; solid noise that swept you off your feet. . . . Swept your brain off its feet. Someone else took control of it. You became second-in-command of your own soul. Waiting for its C.O. to be squashed flat by the direct hit of a four point two before you got control again.

There was nothing to see; mad lights whirled over the black heavens. He moved along the mud of the trench. It amazed him to find that it was raining. In torrents. You imagined that the heavenly powers in decency suspended their activities at such moments. But there was positively lightning. They didn't! A Verey light or something extinguished *that*: not very efficient lightning, really. Just at that moment he fell on his nose at an angle of forty-five degrees against some squashed earth where, as he remembered, the parapet had been revetted. The trench had been squashed in. Level with the outside ground. A pair of boots emerged from the pile of mud. How the deuce did the fellow get into that position?

Broadside on to the hostilities in progress! . . . But naturally, he had been running along the trench when that stuff buried him. Clean buried, anyhow. The obliging Verey light showed to Tietjens, just level with his left hand, a number of small smoking fragments. The white

smoke ran level with the ground in a stiff breeze. Other little patches of smoke added themselves quickly. The Verey light went out. Things were coming over. Something hit his foot; the heel of his boot. Not unpleasantly, a smarting feeling as if his sole had been slapped.

It suggested itself to him, under all the noise, that there being no parapet there . . . He got back into the trench towards the dug-out, skating in the sticky mud. The duck-boards were completely sunk in it. In the whole affair it was the slippery mud he hated most. Again a Verey light obliged, but the trench being deep there was nothing to see except the backside of a man. Tietjens said:

'If he's wounded . . . Even if he's dead one ought to pull him down. . . . And get the Victoria Cross!'

The figure slid down into the trench. Speedily, with drill-movements, engrossed, it crammed two clips of cartridges into a rifle correctly held at the loading angle. In a rift of the noise, like a crack in the wall of a house, it remarked:

'Can't reload lying up there, sir. Mud gets into your magazine.' He became again merely the sitting portion of a man, presenting to view the only part of him that was not caked with mud. The Verey light faded. Another reinforced the blinking effect. From just overhead.

Round the next traverse after the mouth of their dug-out a rapt face of a tiny subaltern, gazing upwards at a Verey illumination, with an elbow on an equality of the trench and the forearm pointing upwards suggested—the rapt face suggested *The Soul's Awakening!* . . . In another rift in the sound the voice of the tiny subaltern stated that he had to economise the Verey cartridges. The battalion was very short. At the same time it was difficult to time them so as to keep the lights going. . . . This seemed fantastic! The Huns were just coming over.

With the finger of his upward pointing hand the tiny subaltern pulled the trigger of his upward-pointing pistol. A second later more brilliant illumination descended from above. The subaltern pointed the clumsy pistol to the

ground in the considerable physical effort—for such a tiny person!—to reload the large implement. A very gallant child—name of Aranjuez. Maltese, or Portuguese, or Levantine—in origin.

The pointing of the pistol downwards revealed that he had practically coiled around his little feet, a collection of tubular, dead, khaki limbs. It didn't need any rift in the sound to make you understand that his loader had been killed on him. . . . By signs and removing his pistol from his grasp Tietjens made the subaltern—he was only two days out from England—understand that he had better go and get a drink and some bearers for the man who might not be dead.

He was, however. When they removed him a little to make room for Tietjens' immensely larger boots his arms just flopped in the mud, the tin hat that covered the face, to the sky. Like a lay figure, but a little less stiff. Not yet cold.

Tietjens became like a solitary statue of the Bard of Avon, the shelf for his elbow being rather low. Noise increased. The orchestra was bringing in *all* the brass, *all* the strings, *all* the wood-wind, all the percussion instruments. The performers threw about biscuit tins filled with horse-shoes; they emptied sacks of coal on cracked gongs, they threw down forty-storey iron houses. It was comic to the extent that an operatic orchestra's crescendo is comic. Crescendo! . . . Crescendo! C R R R R R E S C. . . . The Hero *must* be coming! He didn't!

Still like Shakespeare contemplating the creation of, say, Cordelia, Tietjens leaned against his shelf. From time to time he pulled the trigger of the horse-pistol; from time to time he rested the butt on his ledge and rammed a charge home. When one jammed he took another. He found himself keeping up a fairly steady illumination.

The Hero arrived. Naturally, he was a Hun. He came over, all legs and arms going, like a catamount; struck the face of the parados, fell into the trench on the dead body, with his hands to his eyes, sprang up again and danced.

With heavy deliberation Tietjens drew his great trench-knife rather than his revolver. Why? The butcher-instinct? Or trying to think himself with the Exmoor stag-hounds? The man's shoulders had come down heavily on him as he had rebounded from the parados-face. He felt outraged. Watching that performing Hun he held the knife pointed and tried to think of the German of *Hands Up*. He imagined it to be *Hoch die Händel!* He looked for a nice spot in the Hun's side.

His excursion into a foreign tongue proved supererogatory. The German threw his arms abroad, his—considerably mashed!—face to the sky.

Always dramatic, Cousin Fritz! Too dramatic, really.

He fell, crumpling, into his untidy boots. Nasty boots, all crumpled too, up the calves! But he didn't say *Hoch der Kaiser*, or *Deutschland über alles*, or anything valedictory.

Tietjens fired another light upwards and filled in another charge, then down on his hams in the mud he squatted over the German's head, the fingers of both hands under the head. He could feel the great groans thrill his fingers. He let go and felt tentatively for his brandy flask.

But there was a muddy group round the traverse end. The noise reduced itself to half. It was bearers for the corpse. And the absurdly wee Aranjuez and a new loader. . . . In those days they had not been so short of men! Shouts were coming along the trench. No doubt other Huns were in.

Noise reduced itself to a third. A bumpy diminuendo. Bumpy! Sacks of coal continued to fall down the stairs with a regular cadence; more irregularly, Bloody Mary, who was just behind the trench, or seemed like it, shook the whole house as you might say and there were other naval howitzers or something, somewhere.

Tietjens said to the bearers:

'Take the Hun first. He's alive. Our man's dead.' He was quite remarkably dead. He hadn't, Tietjens had observed, when he bent over the German, really got what

you might call a head, though there was something in its place. What had done that?

Aranjuez, taking his place beside the trench-face, said:

'Damn cool you were, sir. Damn cool. I never saw a knife drawn so slow!' They had watched the Hun do the *danse du ventre*! The poor beggar had had rifles and the young feller's revolver turned on him all the time. They would probably have shot him some more but for the fear of hitting Tietjens. Half-a-dozen Germans had jumped into that sector of trenches in various places. As mad as march hares! . . . That fellow had been shot through both eyes, a fact that seemed to fill the little Aranjuez with singular horror. He said he would go mad if he thought he would be blinded, because there was a girl in the teashop at Bailleul, and a fellow called Spofforth of the Wiltshires would get her if his, Aranjuez's, beauty was spoiled. He positively whimpered at the thought, and then gave the information that this was considered to be a false alarm: he meant a feigned attack to draw off troops from somewhere else where the real attempt was being made. There must be pretty good hell going on somewhere else, then.

It looked like that. For almost immediately all the guns had fallen silent except for one or two that bumped and grumped. . . . It had all been just for fun, then!

Well, they were damn near Bailleul now. They would be driven past it in a day or two. On the way to the Channel. Aranjuez would have to hurry to see his girl. The little devil! He had overdrawn his confounded little account over his girl, and Tietjens had had to guarantee his overdraft—which he could not afford to do. Now the little wretch would probably overdraw still more—and Tietjens would have to guarantee still more of an overdraft.

But that night, when Tietjens had gone down into the black silence of his own particular branch of a cellar—they really had been in wine-cellars at that date, cellars stretching for hundreds of yards under chalk with strata of clay

which made the mud so particularly sticky and offensive—he had found the sound of the pickaxes beneath his flea-bag almost unbearable. They were probably our own men. Obviously they were our own men. But it had not made much difference, for, of course, if they were there they would be an attraction, and the Germans might just as well be below them, countermining.

His nerves had been put in a bad way by that rotten *strafe* that had been just for fun. He knew his nerves were in a bad way because he had a ghostly visit from 09 Morgan, a fellow whose head had been smashed, as it were, on his, Tietjens', own hands, just after Tietjens had refused him home leave to go and get killed by a prize-fighter who had taken up with his, 09 Morgan's, wife. It was complicated but Tietjens wished that fellows who wished to fall on him when they were stopping things would choose to stop things with something else than their heads. That wretched Hun dropping on his shoulder, when, by the laws of war, he ought to have been running back to his own lines, had given him, Tietjens, a jar that still shook his whole body. And, of course, a shock. The fellow had looked something positively Apocalyptic, his whitey-grey arms and legs spread abroad. . . . And it had been an imbecile affair, with no basis of real fighting. . . .

That thin surge of whitey-grey objects of whom not more than a dozen had reached the line—Tietjens knew that, because, with a melodramatically drawn revolver and the fellows who would have been really better employed carrying away the unfortunate Hun who had had in consequence to wait half an hour before being attended to—with those fellows loaded up with Mills bombs like people carrying pears, he had dodged, revolver first, round half-a-dozen traverses, and in quite enough of remains of gas to make his lungs unpleasant. . . . Like a child playing a game of 'I spy!' Just like that. . . . But only to come on several lots of Tommies standing round unfortunate objects who were either trembling with fear and wet and sweat, or panting with their nice little run. . . .

This surge then of whitey-grey objects, sacrificed for fun, was intended . . . was intended ulti . . . ultim . . . then . . .

A voice, just under his camp-bed, said:

'*Bringt dem Hauptmann eine Kerze. . .*' As who should say: 'Bring a candle for the Captain. . . ' Just like that! A dream!

It hadn't been as considerable a shock as you might have thought to a man just dozing off. Not really as bad as the falling dream: but quite as awakening. . . His mind had resumed that sentence.

The handful of Germans who had reached the trench, had been sacrificed for the stupid sort of fun called Strategy. Probably. Stupid! . . . It was, of course, just like German spooks to go mining by candle-light. Obsoletely Nibelungen-like. Dwarfs probably! . . . They had sent over that thin waft of men under a blessed lot of barrage and stuff. . . A lot! a *whole* lot! It had been quite an artillery *strafe*. Ten thousand shells as like as not. Then, somewhere up the line they had probably made a demonstration in force. *Great* bodies of men, an immense surge. And twenty to thirty thousand shells. Very likely some miles of esplanade, as it were, with the sea battering against it. And only a demonstration in force. . .

It could not be real fighting. They had not been ready for their spring advance.

It had been meant to impress somebody imbecile. . . Somebody imbecile in Wallachia, or Sofia, or Asia Minor. Or Whitehall, very likely. Or the White House! . . . Perhaps they had killed a lot of Yankees—to make themselves Transatlantic popular. There were no doubt, by then, whole American Army Corps in the line somewhere. By then! Poor devils, coming so late into such an accentuated hell. Damnably accentuated. . . The sound of even that little bit of fun had been portentously more awful than even quite a big show say in '15. It was better to have been in then and got used to it. . . If it hadn't broken you, just by duration. . .

Might be to impress anybody. . . But who was going to

be impressed? Of course, our legislators with the stewed-pear brains running about the ignoble corridors with coke-brize floors and mahogany doors . . . might be impressed. You must not rhyme! . . . Or, of course, our own legislators might have been trying a nice little demonstration in force, equally idiotic somewhere else, to impress someone just as unlikely to be impressed. . . . This, then, would be the answer! But no one ever would be impressed again. We all had each other's measures. So it was just wearisome. . . .

It was remarkably quiet in that thick darkness. Down below, the picks continued their sinister confidences in each other's ears. . . . It was really like that. Like children in the corner of a schoolroom whispering nasty comments about their masters, one to the other. . . . Girls, for choice. . . . Chop, chop, chop, a pick whispered. Chop? another asked in an undertone. The first said Chopchopchop. Then Chup. . . . And a silence of irregular duration. . . . Like what happens when you listen to typewriting and the young woman has to stop to put in another page. . . .

Nice young women with typewriters in Whitehall had very likely taken from dictation, on hot-pressed, square sheets with embossed royal arms, the plan for that very *strafe*. . . . Because, obviously, it might have been dictated from Whitehall almost as directly as from Unter den Linden. We might have been making a demonstration in force on the Dwolologda in order to get the Huns to make a counter-demonstration in Flanders. Hoping poor old Puffles would get it in the neck. For they were trying still to smash poor old General Puffles and stop the single command. . . . They might very well be hoping that our losses through the counter-demonstration would be so heavy that the Country would cry out for the evacuation of the Western Front. . . . If they could get half-a-million of us killed perhaps the Country might. . . . They, no doubt, thought it worth trying. But it was wearisome: those fellows in Whitehall never learned. Any more than Brother Boche. . . .

Nice to be in poor old Puffles' army. Nice but wearisome.

... Nice girls with typewriters in well-ventilated offices. Did they still put paper cuffs on to keep their sleeves from ink? He would ask Valen... Valen... It was warm and still... On such a night...

'Bringt dem Hauptmann eine Kerze!' A voice from under his camp bed! He imagined that the Hauptmann spook must be myopic: short-sightedly examining a tamping fuze... If they used tamping fuzes or if that was what they called them in the army!

He could not see the face or the spectacles of the Hauptmann any more than he could see the faces of his men. Not through his flea-bag and shins! They were packed in the tunnel; whitish-grey, tubular agglomerations... Large! Like the maggots that are eaten by Australian natives... Fear possessed him!

He sat up in his flea-bag, dripping with icy sweat.

'By Jove, I'm for it!' he said. He imagined that his brain was going: he was mad and seeing himself go mad. He cast about in his mind for some subject about which to think so that he could prove to himself that he had not gone mad.

II

The key-bugle remarked with singular distinction to the dawn:

dy
I know a lad fair kind
and
Was never face
so mind
please my
y

A sudden waft of pleasure at the seventeenth-century air that the tones gave to the landscape went all over Tietjens... Herrick and Purcell!... Or perhaps it was a modern imitation. Good enough. He asked:

‘What the devil’s that row, Sergeant?’

The Sergeant disappeared behind the muddled sacking curtain. There was a guard-room in there. The key-bugle said:

Fair kind....
and
Fair Fair Fair
kind....
and.... and.... and

It might be two hundred yards off along the trenches. Astonishing pleasure came to him from that seventeenth-century air and the remembrance of those exact, quiet words.... Or perhaps he had not got them right. Nevertheless, they were exact and quiet. As efficient working beneath the soul as the picks of miners in the dark.

The Sergeant returned with the obvious information that it was OII Griffiths practising on the cornet. Captain McKechnie ad promised to ear im after breakfast n recommend im to the Divisional Follies to play at the concert to-night, if e like im.

Tietjens said:

‘Well, I hope Captain McKechnie likes him!’

He hoped McKechnie, with his mad eyes and his pestilential accent, would like that fellow. That fellow spread seventeenth-century atmosphere across the landscape over which the sun’s rays were beginning to flood a yellow wash. Then, might the seventeenth century save the fellow’s life, for his good taste! For his life would probably be saved. He, Tietjens, would give him a pass back to Division to get ready for the concert. So he would be out of the *strafe*.... Probably none of them would be alive after the *strafe* that Brigade reported to be coming in.... Twenty-seven minutes, by now! Three hundred and twenty-eight fighting men against.... Say a Division. Any preposterous number.... Well, the seventeenth century might as well save one man!

What had become of the seventeenth century? And Herbert and Donne and Crashaw and Vaughan, the Silurist? . . . Sweet day so cool, so calm, so bright, the bridal of the earth and sky! . . . By Jove, it was that! . . . Old Campion flashing like a popinjay in the scarlet and gilt of the Major-General, had quoted that in the base camp, years ago. Or was it months? Or wasn't it: 'But at my back I always hear Time's winged chariots hurrying near,' that he had quoted?

Anyhow, not bad for an old General!

He wondered what had become of that elegant collection of light yellow, scarlet and gilt. . . . Somehow he always thought of Campion as in light yellow, rather than khaki, so much did he radiate light. . . . Campion and his, Tietjens', wife, radiating light together—she in a golden gown!

Campion was about due in these latitudes. It was astonishing that he had not turned up before. But poor old Puffles with his abominably weakened Army had done too jolly well to be replaced. Even at the request of the Minister whot hated him. Good for him!

It occurred to him that if he . . . call it 'stopped one' that day, Campion would probably marry his, Tietjens', widow. . . . Sylvia in crêpe. With perhaps a little white about it!

The cornet—obviously it was not a key-bugle—remarked:

: her pass by . . .
 ing

I did but view

and then stopped to reflect. After a moment it added meditatively:

		. her . . .
		. .
<i>And</i>		. .
<i>now</i>		. .
<i>I</i>		. .
<i>love</i>		. till
		<i>I die!</i>

That would scarcely refer to Sylvia. . . . Still, perhaps in crêpe, with a touch of white, passing by, very tall. . . . Say, in a seventeenth century street. . . .

The only satisfactory age in England! . . . Yet what chance had it to-day? Or, still more, to-morrow? In the sense that the age of, say, Shakespeare had a chance. Or Pericles! or Augustus!

Heaven knew, we did not want a preposterous drum-beating such as the Elizabethans produced—and received. Like lions at a fair. . . . But what chance had quiet fields, Anglican sainthood, accuracy of thought, heavy-leaved, timbered hedgerows, slowly creeping plough-lands moving up the slopes? . . . Still, the land remains. . . .

The land remains. . . . It remains! . . . At that same moment the dawn was wetly revealing; over there in George Herbert's parish. . . . What was it called? . . . What the devil was its name? Oh, Hell! . . . Between Salisbury and Wilton. . . . The tiny church. . . . But he refused to consider the plough-lands, the heavy groves, the slow high-road above the church that the dawn was at that moment wetly revealing—until he could remember that name. . . . He refused to consider that, probably even to-day, that land ran to . . . produced the stock of . . . Anglican sainthood. The quiet thing!

But until he could remember the name he would consider nothing. . . .

He said:

'Are those damned Mills bombs coming?'

The Sergeant said:

'In ten minutes they'll be ere, sir. HAY Cumpny had just telephoned that they were coming in now.'

It was almost a disappointment: in an hour or so, without bombs, they might all have been done with. As quiet as the seventeenth century: in heaven. . . . The beastly bombs would have to explode before that, now! They might, in consequence, survive. . . . Then what was he, Tietjens, going to do! Take orders! It was thinkable. . . .

He said:

'Those bloody imbeciles of Huns are coming over in an hour's time, Brigade says. Get the beastly bombs served out, but keep enough in store to serve as an emergency ration if we should want to advance. . . . Say a third. For C and D Companies. . . . Tell the Adjutant I'm going along all the trenches and I want the Assistant-Adjutant, Mr Aranjuez, and Orderly-Corporal Colley to come with me. . . . As soon as the bombs come for certain! . . . I don't want the men to think they've got to stop a Hun rush without bombs. . . . They're due to begin their barrage in fourteen minutes, but they won't really come over without a hell of a lot of preparation. . . . I don't know how Brigade knows all this!'

The name *Bemerton* suddenly came on to his tongue. Yes, Bemerton, Bemerton, Bemerton was George Herbert's parsonage. Bemerton, outside Salisbury. . . . The cradle of the race as far as our race was worth thinking about. He imagined himself standing up on a little hill, a lean contemplative parson, looking at the land sloping down to Salisbury spire. A large, clumsily bound seventeenth-century testament, Greek, beneath his elbow. . . . Imagine standing up on a hill! It was the unthinkable thing there!

The Sergeant was lamenting, a little wearily, that the Huns were coming.

'Hi did think them bleeding 'uns, 'xcuse me, sir, wasn' per'aps coming this morning. . . . Give us a rest an' a chance to clear up a bit. . . .' He had the tone of a resigned schoolboy saying that the Head *might* have given the school a holiday on the Queen's birthday. But what the devil did that man think about his approaching dissolution?

That was the unanswerable question. He, Tietjens, had been asked several times what death was like. . . . Once, in a cattle truck under a bridge, near a Red-Cross Clearing Station, by a miserable fellow called Perowne. In the presence of the troublesome lunatic called McKechnie. You would have thought that even a Movement Order Officer would have managed to send up the line that triangle differently arranged. Perowne was known to have been

his wife's lover; he, Tietjens, against his will, had been given the job, as second-in-command of the battalion, that McKechnie wanted madly. And indeed he had a right to it. They *ought* not to have been sent up together.

But there they had been—Perowne broken down, principally at the thought that he was not going to see his, Tietjens', wife ever again in a golden gown. . . . Unless, perhaps, with a golden harp on a cloud, for he looked at things like that. . . . And, positively, as soon as that baggage-car—it had been a baggage-car, not a cattle-truck!—had discharged the deserter with escort and the three wounded Cochin-Chinese platelayers whom the French authorities had palmed off on them. . . . And where the devil had they all been going? Obviously up into the line, and already pretty near it: near Division Headquarters. But where? . . . God knew? Or when? God knew too! . . . A fine-ish day with a scanty remains of not quite melted snow in the cutting and the robins singing in the coppice above. Say February. . . . Say St Valentine's Day: which, of course would agitate Perowne some more. . . . Well, positively as soon as the baggage-car had discharged the wounded who had groaned, and the sheepish escort who did not know whether they ought to be civil to the deserter in the presence of the orfcers, and the deserter who kept on defiantly—or if you like brokenheartedly, for there was no telling the difference—asking the escort questions as to the nature of their girls, or volunteering information as to the intimate behaviour of *his*. . . . The deserter a gipsyified, black-eyed fellow with an immense jeering mouth; the escort a Corporal and two Tommies, blond and blushing East Kents, remarkably polished about the buttons and brass numerals, with beautifully neatly put on puttees: obviously Regulars, coming from behind the lines; the Cochin-Chinese, with indistinguishable broad yellow faces, brown poetic eyes, furred top-boots and blue furred hoods over their bandaged heads and swathed faces. Seated, leaning back against the side of the box-truck and groaning now and then and shivering all the time. . . .

Well, the moment they had been cleared out at the Deputy Sub RTO's tin shed by the railway bridge, the fellow Perowne with his well-padded presence and his dark babu-Hinduish aspect had bubbled out with questions as to the hereafter according to Tietjens and as to the nature of Death; the immediate process of dissolution: dying. . . . And in between Perowne's questions McKechnie, with his unspeakable intonation and his dark eyes as mad as a cat's, had asked Tietjens how he dared get himself appointed second-in-command of his, McKechnie's own battalion. . . . 'You're no soldier,' he would burst out. 'Do you think you are a b——y infantryman? You're a mealsack, and what the devil's to become of *my* battalion. . . . Mine. . . . My battalion! *Our* battalion of pals!'

That had been in, presumably, February, and, presumably, it was now April. The way the dawn came up looked like April. . . . What did it matter? . . . That damned truck had stayed under that bridge for two hours and a half . . . in the process of the eternal waiting that is War. You hung about and you hung about, and you kicked your heels and you kicked your heels: waiting for Mills bombs to come, or for jam, or for generals, or for the tanks, or transport, or the clearance of the road ahead. You waited in offices under the eyes of somnolent orderlies, under fire on the banks of canals, you waited in hotels, dug-outs, tin sheds, ruined houses. There will be no man who survives of His Majesty's Armed Forces that shall not remember those eternal hours when Time itself stayed still as the true image of bloody War! . . .

Well, in that case Providence seemed to have decreed a waiting just long enough to allow Tietjens to persuade the unhappy mortal called Perowne that death was not a very dreadful affair. . . . He had enough intellectual authority to persuade the fellow with his glued-down black hair that Death supplied His own anaesthetics. That was the argument. On the approach of Death all the faculties are so numbed that you feel neither pain nor apprehension. . . .

He could still hear the heavy, authoritative words that, on that occasion, he had used.

The Providence of Perowne! For, when he was dug out after, next night having been buried in going up into the trenches, they said, he had a smile like a young baby's on his face. He didn't have long to wait and died with a smile on his face . . . nothing having so much become him during his life as . . . Well, a becoming smile! During life he had seemed a worried, fussing sort of chap.

Bully for Perowne. . . . But what about him. Tietjens? Was that the sort of thing that Providence ought to do to one? . . . That's TEMPTING GOD!

The Sergeant beside him said:

'Then a man could stand hup on an ill. . . . You really mean to say, sir, that you think a man will be able to stand up on a bleedin' ill. . . .'

Presumably Tietjens had been putting heart into that acting temporary Sergeant-Major. He could not remember what he had been saying to the N.C.O. because his mind had been so deeply occupied with the image of Perowne. . . . He said:

'You're a Lincolnshire man, aren't you? You come from a Fen country. What do you want to stand up on a hill for?'

The man said:

'Ah, but you *do*, sir!'

He added:

'You want to stand up! Take a look round. . . .' He struggled for expression: 'Like as if you wanted to breathe deep after bein in a stoopin posture for a long time!'

Tietjens said:

'Well, you can do that here. With discretion. I did it just now. . . .'

The man said:

'You, sir. . . . You're a law hunto yourself!'

It was the most considerable shock that Tietjens received in the course of his military career. And the most considerable reward.

There were all these inscrutable beings: the Other

Ranks, a brownish mass, spreading underground, like clay strata in the gravel, beneath all this waving country that the sun would soon be warming: they were in holes, in tunnels, behind sackcloth curtains, carrying on . . . carrying on some sort of life: conversing, breathing, desiring. But completely mysterious, in the mass. Now and then you got a glimpse of a passionate desire: 'A man could stand up on a bleedin' ill!'; now and then you got—though you knew that they watched you eternally and knew the minutest gestures of your sleep—you got some sort of indication as to how they regarded you: 'You are a law unto yourself!'

That must be hero-worship: an acting temporary regimental Sergeant-Major, without any real knowledge of his job, extemporising, not so long ago a carrier in an eastern county of remarkable flatness, does not tell his Acting Commanding Officer that he is a law unto himself without meaning it to be a flattering testimony: a certificate, as far as it went, of trustworthiness. . . .

They were now crawling out into the light of day. . . . from behind the sacking: six files that he had last night transferred from C to D Coy., D having been reduced to forty-three rank and file. They shuffled out, an extraordinary Falstaff's battalion of muddy odd-come shorts; fell into some sort of alignment in the trench; shuffled an inch further this way, an inch further that; pushed up their chin-straps and pulled them down; humped up their packs by hunching their shoulders and jerking; adjusted their water bottles and fell into some sort of immobility, their rifles, more or less aligned, poked out before them. In that small company they were men of all sorts of sizes, of all sorts of disparities and grotesquenesses of physique. Two of them were music-hall comedians and the whole lot looked as if they made up a knock-about turn. . . . The Rag Time Army: at its vocation: living and breathing.

The Sergeant called them to attention and they wavered back and forward. The Sergeant said:

'The Commandin' Officer's lookin' at you. FIX . . . B'ts!'

And, positively, a dwarf concealed under a pudding

basin shuffled a foot length and a half forward in the mud, protruded his rifle-muzzle between his bent knees, jerked his head swiftly to strain his sight along the minute line. . . . It was like a blurred fairy-tale! Why did that dwarf behave in a smart and soldierly manner? Through despair? It wasn't likely!

The men wavered like the edge of a field of tall grass with the wind running along it; they felt round themselves for their bayonet-handles, like women attempting difficult feats with their skirts. . . . The dwarf cut his hand smartly away to his side, as the saying is; the men pulled their rifles up into line. Tietjens exclaimed:

'Stand at ease: stand easy,' negligently enough, then he burst out in uncontrollable irritation: 'For *God's* sake, put your beastly hats straight!' The men shuffled uneasily, this being no order known to them, and Tietjens explained: 'No, this isn't drill. It's only that your hats all at sixes and sevens give me the pip!' And the whispers of the men went down the little line:

'You 'eer the orfcer. . . . Gives 'im the pip, we do! . . . Goin' for a wawk in the pawk wiv our gels, we are. . . .' They glanced nevertheless aside and upwards at each other's tin-hat rims and said: 'Shove 'im a shade forward, 'Orace. . . . You tighten your martingale, Erb!' They were gaily rueful and impenitently profane: they had had thirty-six hours of let-off. A fellow louder-than-hummed:

' "As I wawk erlong ther Bor dee Belong
Wiv an indipendent air. . . ."
W're's me swegger-kine, you fellers!'

Tietjens addressed him:

'Did you ever hear Coborn sing that, Runt?' and Runt replied:

'Yes, sir. I was the hind legs of the elephant when he sung it in the Old Drury panto!' . . . A little, dark, beady-eyed Cockney, his enormous mouth moved lip on lip as if he were chewing a pebble in pride at the reminiscence. The men's voices went on: "Ind legs 'f the elephink! . . . good

ol' Helefink. . . . I'll go n see 'n elephink first thing I do in Blighty!'

Tietjens said:

'I'll give every man of you a ticket for Drury Lane next Boxing Day. We'll all be in London for the next Boxing Day. Or Berlin!'

They exclaimed polyphonically and low:

'Oo-er! Djee 'eer 'im? Di'djee 'eer the orfcer? The noo C.O.?'

A hidden man said:

'Mike it the old Shoreditch Empire, sir, n we'll thank you!'

Another:

'I never keered fer the Lane meself! Give me the old Balham for Boxing Day.' The Sergeant made the sounds for them to move off.

They shuffled off up the trench. An unseen man said:

'Better'n a bleedin' dipso!' Lips said 'Shhh!'

The Sergeant shouted—with an astonishing brutal panic:

'You shut your bleedin' mouth, you man, or I'll shove you in the b——y clink!' He looked nevertheless at Tietjens with a calm satisfaction a second later.

'A good lot of chaps, sir,' he said. 'The best!' He was anxious to wipe out the remembrance of the last spoken word. 'Give 'em the right sort of officers n they'll beat the world!'

'Do you think it makes any difference to them what officers they have?' Tietjens asked. 'Wouldn't it be all the same if they had just anyone?'

The Sergeant said:

'No, sir. They bin frightened these last few days. Now they're better.'

This was just exactly what Tietjens did not want to hear. He hardly knew why. Or he did. . . . He said:

'I should have thought these men knew their job so well—for this sort of thing—that they hardly needed orders.

It cannot make much difference whether they receive orders or not.'

The Sergeant said:

'It *does* make a difference, sir,' in a tone as near that of cold obstinacy as he dare attain to; the feeling of the approaching *strafe* was growing on them. It hung over them.

McKechnie stuck his head out from behind the sacking. The sacking had the lettering PXL in red and the word *Minn* in black. McKechnie's eyes were blazing maniacally. Jumping maniacally in his head. They always were jumping maniacally in his head. He was a tiring fellow. He was wearing not a tin hat, but an officer's helmet. The gilt dragon on it glittered. The sun was practically up, somewhere. As soon as its disc cleared the horizon, the Huns, according to Brigade, were to begin sending over their wearisome stuff. In thirteen and a half minutes.

McKechnie gripped Tietjens by the arm, a familiarity that Tietjens detested. He hissed—he really hissed because he was trying to speak under his breath:

'Come past the next traverse. I want to speak to you.'

In correctly prepared trenches, made according to order as these had been to receive them in retreat, by a regular battalion acting under the orders of the Royal Engineers, you go along a straight ditch of trench for some yards, then you find a square block of earth protruding inwards from the parapet round which you must walk; then you come to another straight piece, then to another traverse, and so on to the end of the line, the lengths and dimensions varying to suit the nature of the terrain or the character of the soil. These outjuttings were designed to prevent the lateral spreading of fragments of shell bursting in the trench which would otherwise serve as a funnel, like the barrel of a gun to direct those parts of missiles into men's bodies. It was also exciting—as Tietjens expected to be doing before the setting of the not quite risen sun—to crouch rapidly along past one of them, the heart moving very disagreeably, the revolver protruded well in advance, with

half a dozen careless fellows with grenades of sorts just behind you. And you not knowing whether, crouching against the side that was just round the corner, you would or would not find a whitish, pallid, dangerous object that you would have no time to scrutinize closely.

Past the nearest of these McKechnie led Tietjens. He was portentous and agitated.

At the end of the next stretch of trench, leaning as it were against a buttress in an attitude of intense fatigue, was a mud-coloured, very thin, tall fellow; squatting dozing on his heels in the mud just beside that one's foot was another, a proper Glamorganshire man of whom not many more than ten were left in the battalion. The standing man was leaning like that to look through a loophole that had been placed very close to the buttress of raw earth. He grunted something to his companion and continued looking intently. The other man grunted too.

McKechnie withdrew precipitately into the recessed pathway. The column of earth in their faces gave a sense of oppression. He said:

'Did you put that fellow up to saying that damnable thing? . . .' He repeated: 'That perfectly damnable thing! Damnable!' Besides hating Tietjens he was shocked, pained, femininely lachrymose. He gazed into Tietjens' eyes like a forsaken mistress fit to do a murder, with a sort of wistful incredulity of despair.

To that Tietjens was accustomed. For the last two months McKechnie whispering in the ear of the C.O. wherever Battalion Headquarters might happen to be—McKechnie, with his arms spread abroad on the table and his chin nearly on the cloth that they had always managed to retain in spite of three precipitate moves, McKechnie, with his mad eyes every now and then moving in the direction of Tietjens, had been almost the most familiar object of Tietjens' night landscape. They wanted him gone so that McKechnie might once again become Second in Command of that body of pals. . . . That indeed was

what they were . . . with the addition of a great deal too much of what they called Ooch.

Tietjens obviously could not go. There was no way of managing it: he had been put there by old Campion and there he must remain. So that by the agreeable irony of Providence there was Tietjens, who had wanted above all McKechnie's present relatively bucolic job, hated to hell by half a dozen quite decent if trying young squits—the pals—because Tietjens was in his, McKechnie's, desired position. It seemed to make it all the worse that they were all, with the exception of the Commanding Officer himself, of the little, dark, Cockney type and had the Cockney's voice, gesture and intonation, so that Tietjens felt himself like a blond Gulliver with hair very silver in patches, rising up amongst a lot of Lilliputian brown creatures. . . . Portentous and unreasonably noticeable.

A large cannon, nearer than the one that had lately spoken, but as it were with a larger but softer voice, remarked: 'Phohhhhhhhhh,' the sound wandering round the landscape for a long while. After a time about four coupled railway-trains hurtled jovially amongst the clouds and went a long way away. Four in one. They were probably trying to impress the North Sea.

It might of course be the signal for the German barrage to begin. Tietjens' heart stopped; his skin on the nape of the neck began to prickle: his hands were cold. That was fear: the BATTLE FEAR, experienced in *strafes*. He might not again be able to hear himself think. Not ever. What did he want of life? . . . Well, just not to lose his reason. One would pray: not that. . . . Otherwise, perhaps a nice parsonage might do. It was just thinkable. A place in which for ever to work at the theory of waves. . . . But of course it was not thinkable. . . .

He was saying to McKechnie:

'You ought not to be here without a tin hat. You will have to put a tin hat on if you mean to stop here. I can give you your four minutes if that is not the *strafe* beginning. Who's been saying what?'

McKechnie said:

'I'm not stopping here. I'm going back, after I've given you a piece of my mind, to the beastly job you have got me defiled with.'

Tietjens said:

'Well, you'll put on a tin hat to go there, please. And don't ride your horse, if you've got it here, till after you're a hundred yards at least down a communication trench.'

McKechnie asked how Tietjens dared give him orders and Tietjens said: Fine he would look with Divisional Transport dead in his lines at five in the morning in a parade hat. McKechnie with objurgations said that the Transport Officer had the right to consult the C.O. of a battalion he supplied. Tietjens said:

'I'm commanding here. You've not consulted me!'

It appeared to him queer that they should be behaving like that when you could hear . . . oh, say: the wings of the angel of death. . . . You can 'almost hear the very rustling of his wings' was the quotation. Good enough rhetoric. . . . But of course that was how armed men would behave. . . . At all times!

He had been trying the old trick of the military, clipped voice on the half-dotty subject. It had before then reduced McKechnie to some sort of military behaviour.

It reduced him in this case to a maudlin state. He exclaimed with a sort of lachrymose agony:

'This is what it has come to with the old battalion . . . the b——y, b——y, b——y old battalion of b——rs!' Each imprecation was a sob. 'How we worked at it. . . . And now . . . you've got it!'

Tietjens said:

'Well, you were Vice-Chancellor's Latin Prizeman once. It's what we get reduced to.' He added: '*Vos mellificatis apes!*'

McKechnie said with gloomy contempt:

'You. . . . You're no Latinist!'

By now Tietjens had counted two hundred and eighty since the big cannon had said 'Phoooooh'. Perhaps then it

was not the signal for the barrage to begin. . . . Had it been it would have begun before now; it would have come thumping along on the heels of the 'Phoooooh'. His hands and the nape of his neck were preparing to become normal.

Perhaps the *strafe* would not come at all that day. There was the wind. If anything it was strengthening. Yesterday he had suspected that the Germans hadn't got any tanks handy. Perhaps the ugly, senseless armadillos—and incapable at that! Under-engined!—had all got stuck in the marshes in front of G section. Perhaps the heavy artillery fire of ours that had gone on most of yesterday had been meant to pound the beastly things to pieces. Moving, they looked like slow rats, their noses to the ground, snouting crumbs of garbage. When they were still they looked merely pensive.

Perhaps the *strafe* would not come. He hoped it would not. He did not want a *strafe* with himself in command of the battalion. He did not know what to do: what he ought to do by the book. He knew what he would do. He would stroll about along those deep trenches. Stroll. With his hands in his pockets. Like General Gordon in pictures. He would say contemplative things as the time dragged on. . . . A rather abominable sort of Time really. . . . But that would introduce into the Battalion a spirit of calm that it had lately lacked. . . . The night before last the C.O., with a bottle in each hand, had hurled them both at Huns who did not materialize for an hour and a half. Even the Pals had omitted to laugh. After that he, Tietjens, had taken command. With lots of the Orderly Room papers under both arms. They had had to be in a hurry. At night. With men suggesting pale grey Canadian trappers coming out of holes!

He did not want to command in a *strafe*: or at any other time! He hoped the unfortunate C.O. would get over his trouble by the evening. . . . But he supposed that he, Tietjens, would get through it all right if he had to. Like the man who had never tried playing the violin!

McKechnie had suddenly become lachrymosely femi-

nine: like a woman pleading, large-eyed, for her lover, his eyes explored Tietjens' face for signs of treachery: for signs that what he said was not what he meant in his heart. He said:

'What are you going to do about Bill? Poor old Bill that has sweated for his Battalion as you never. . . .' He began again:

'Think of poor old Bill! You can't be *thinking* of doing the dirty on him. . . . No man could be such a swine!'

It was curious how those circumstances brought out the feminine that was in man. What was that ass of a German Professor's theory . . . formula? *My plus W^x equals Man?* . . . Well, if God hadn't invented woman men would have had to do so. In that sort of place. You grew sentimental. He, Tietjens, was growing sentimental. He said:

'What does Terence say about him this morning?'

The nice thing to have said would have been:

'Of course, old man, I'll do all I can to keep it dark!' Terence was the M.O.—the man who had chucked his cap at the Hun orderly.

McKechnie said:

'That's the damnable thing! Terence is ratty with him. He won't take a pill!'

Tietjens said:

'What's that? What's that?'

McKechnie wavered: his desire for comfort became overpowering.

He said:

'Look here! *Do* the decent thing! You know how poor Bill has worked for us! Get Terence not to report him to Brigade!'

This was wearisome: but it had to be faced.

A very minute subaltern—Aranjuez—in a perfectly impossible tin hat peered round the side of the bank. Tietjens sent him away for a moment. . . . These tin hats were probably all right: but they were the curse of the army. They bred distrust! How could you trust a man whose incapable hat tumbled forward on his nose? Or another,

with his hat on the back of his head, giving him the air of a ruined gambler! Or a fellow who had put on a soap-dish. To amuse the children: not a serious proceeding. . . . The German things were better—coming down over the nape of the neck and rising over the brows. When you saw a Hun sideways he looked something: a serious proposition. Full of ferocity. A Hun against a Tommie looked like a Holbein *landsknecht* fighting a music-hall turn. It made you feel that you were indeed a rag-time army. Rubbed it in!

McKechnie was reporting that the C.O. had refused to take a pill ordered him by the M.O. Unfortunately the M.O. was ratty that morning—too much hooch overnight! So he said he should report the C.O. to Brigade. Not as being unfit for further service, for he wasn't. But for refusing to take the pill. It was damnable. Because if Bill wouldn't take a pill he wouldn't . . . The M.O. said that if he took a pill, and stayed in bed that day—without hooch of course!—he would be perfectly fit on the morrow. He had been like that often enough before. The C.O. had always been given the dose before as a drench. He swore he would not take it as a ball. Sheer contrariety!

Tietjens was accustomed to think of the C.O. as a lad—a good lad, but young. They were, all the same, much of an age, and, for the matter of that, because of his deeply-lined forehead the Colonel looked the older often enough. But when he was fit he was fine. He had a hooked nose, a forcible grey moustache, like two badger-haired paint-brushes joined beneath the nose, pink skin as polished as the surface of a billiard ball, a noticeably narrow but high forehead, an extremely piercing glance from rather colourless eyes; his hair was black and most polished in slight waves. He was a soldier.

He was, that is to say, the ranker. Of soldiering in the English sense—the real soldiering of peace-time, parades, social events, spit and polish, hard worked summers, leisurely winters, India, the Bahamas, Cairo seasons and the rest he only knew the outside, having looked at it from the barrack windows, the parade ground and luckily for

him, from his Colonel's house. He had been a most admirable batman to that Colonel, had—in Simla—married the Colonel memsahib's lady's maid, had been promoted to the orderly-room, to the Corporals' and Sergeants' messes, had become a Musketry-Colour Sergeant, and two months before the war had been given a commission. He would have gained this before but for a slight—a very slight—tendency to overdrinking, which had given on occasion a similarly slight tone of insolence to his answers to Field-Officers. Elderly Field-Officers on parade are apt to make slight mistakes in their drill, giving the command to move to the right when technically, though troops are moving to the right, the command should be: 'Move to the left!'; and the officers' left being the troops' right, on a field-day, after lunch, Field-Officers of a little rustiness are apt to grow confused. It then becomes the duty of warrant-officers present if possible to rectify, or if not, to accept the responsibility for the resultant commotion. On two occasions during his brilliant career, being slightly elated, this wartime C.O. had neglected this military duty, the result being subsequent Orderly Room *Strafes* which remained as black patches when he looked back on his past life and which constantly embittered his remembrances. Professional soldiers are like that.

In spite of an exceptionally fine service record he remained bitter, and upon occasion he became unreasonable. Being what the men—and for the matter of that the officers of the battalion, too—called a b——y h——ll of a pusher, he had brought his battalion up to a great state of efficiency; he had earned a double string of ribbons and by pushing his battalion into extremely tight places, by volunteering it for difficult services which, even during trench warfare, did present themselves, and by extricating what remained of it with singular skill during the first battle of the Somme on an occasion—perhaps the most lamentable of the whole war—when an entire division commanded by a political rather than a military general had been wiped out, he had earned for his battalion a French decoration called a

Fourragère which is seldom given to other than French regiments. These exploits and the spirit which dictated them were perhaps less appreciated by the men under his command than was imagined by the C.O. and his bosom friend, Captain McKechnie who had loyally aided him, but they *did* justify the two in attaching to the battalion the sort of almost maudlin sentimentality that certain parents will bestow upon their children.

In spite, however, of the appreciation that his services had received the C.O. remained embittered. He considered that, by this time, he ought at least to have been given a brigade if not a division, and he considered that, if that was not the case, it was largely due to the two black marks against him as well as to the fact of his low social origin. And when he had a little liquor taken these obsessions exaggerated themselves very quickly to a degree that very nearly endangered his career. It was not that he soaked—but there were occasions during that period of warfare when the consumption of a certain amount of alcohol was a necessity if the human being were to keep on carrying on and through rough places. Then, happy was the man who carried his liquor well.

Unfortunately the C.O. was not one of these. Worn out by continual attention to papers—at which he was no great hand—and by fighting that would continue for days on end, he would fortify himself with whisky and immediately his bitterness would overwhelm his mentality, the aspect of the world would change, and he would rail at his superiors in the army and sometimes would completely refuse to obey orders, as had been the occasion a few nights before, when he had refused to let his battalion take part in the concerted retreat of the Army Corps. Tietjens had had to see to this.

Now, exasperated by the after effects of several days' great anxieties and alcoholisms, he was refusing to take a pill. This was a token of his contempt for his superiors, the outcome of his obsession of bitterness.

III

An army—especially in peace time—is a very complex and nicely adjusted affair, and though active operations against an enemy force are apt to blunt niceness and upset compensations—as they might for a chronometer—and although this of ours, according to its own computation, was only a rag-time aggregation, certain customs of times when this force was also Regular had an enormous power of survival.

It may seem a comic affair that a Colonel commanding a regiment in the midst of the most breathless period of hostilities, should refuse to take a pill. But the refusal, precisely like a grain of sand in the works of a chronometer, may cause the most singular perturbations. It was so in this case.

A sick officer of the very highest rank is the subordinate of his doctor the moment he puts himself into the M.O.'s hands: he must obey orders as if he were a Tommy. A Colonel whole and in his senses may obviously order his M.O. to go here and there and to perform this or that duty; the moment he becomes sick the fact that his body is the property of His Majesty the King comes forcibly into operation and the M.O. is the representative of the sovereign in so far as bodies are concerned. This is very reasonable and proper, because sick bodies are not only of no use to the King, but are enormously detrimental to the army that has to cart them about.

In the case that Tietjens had perforce to worry over, the matter was very much complicated in the first place by the fact of the great personal dislike that the C.O. had manifested—though always with a sort of Field-Officer's monumental courtesy—towards himself, and then because Tietjens had a very great respect for the abilities of the Commanding Officer as Commanding Officer. His rag-time battalion of a rag-time army was as nearly on the level of an impeccable regular battalion as such a unit with its constantly changing personnel could possibly be. Nothing

had much more impressed Tietjens in the course of even the whole war, than the demeanour of the soldier whom the other night he had seen firing engrossedly into invisibility. The man had fired with care, had come down to re-load with exact drill movements—which are the quickest possible. He had muttered some words which showed that his mind was entirely on his job like a mathematician engrossed in an abstruse calculation. He had climbed back on to the parapet; continued to fire engrossedly into invisibility; had returned and re-loaded and had again climbed back. He might have been firing off a tie at the butts!

It was a very great achievement to have got men to fire at moments of such stress with such complete tranquillity. For discipline works in two ways: in the first place it enables the soldier in action to get through his movements in the shortest possible time; and then the engrossment in the exact performance begets a great indifference to danger. When, with various sized pieces of metal flying all round you, you go composedly through efficient bodily movements, you are not only wrapped up in your task, but you have the knowledge that that exact performance is every minute decreasing your personal danger. In addition you have the feeling that Providence ought to—and very frequently does—specially protect you. It would not be right that a man exactly and scrupulously performing his duty to his sovereign, his native land and those it holds dear, should not be protected by a special Providence. And he is!

It is not only that that engrossed marksman might—and very probably did—pick off an advancing enemy with every second shot, and thus diminish his personal danger to that extent; it is that the regular and as if mechanical falling of comrades spreads disproportionate dismay in advancing or halted troops. It is no doubt terrible to you to have large numbers of your comrades instantaneously annihilated by the explosion of some huge engine, but huge engines are blind and thus accidental; a slow, regular picking off of the man beside you is evidence that human terribleness that is

not blind or accidental is cold-bloodedly and unshakably turning its attention to a spot very near you. It may very shortly turn its attention to yourself.

Of course, it is disagreeable when artillery is bracketting across your line: a shell falls a hundred yards in front of you, another a hundred yards behind you: the next will be halfway between, and you are halfway between. The waiting wrings your soul; but it does not induce panic or the desire to run—at any rate to nearly the same extent. Where, in any event, could you run to?

But from coldly and mechanically advancing and firing troops you *can* run. And the C.O. was accustomed to boast that on the several occasions when, imitating the second battalion of the regiment, he had been able to line his men up on tapes before letting them go in an attack and had insisted that they should advance at a very slow double indeed, and in exact alignment, his losses had been not only less than those of every other battalion in the Division, but they had been almost farcically negligible. Faced with troops advancing remorselessly and with complete equanimity the good Wurtembergers had fired so wildly and so high that you could hear their bullets overhead like a flock of wild-geese at night. The effect of panic is to make men fire high. They pull too sharply on their triggers.

These boasts of their Old Man naturally reached the men: they would be uttered before warrant officers and the orderly room staff; and the men—than whom in this matter none are keener mathematicians—were quick to see that the losses of their battalion until lately, at any rate, had been remarkably smaller than those of other units engaged in the same places. So that hitherto, though the men had regarded their Colonel with mixed feelings, he had certainly come out on top. That he was a b——y h——ll of a pusher did not elate them; they would have preferred to be reserved for less dangerous enterprises than those by which the battalion gained its remarkable prestige. On the other hand, though they were constantly being pushed into nasty scrapes, they lost less than units in quieter positions,

and that pleased them. But they still asked themselves: 'If the Old Man let us be quiet shouldn't we lose proportionately still less? No one at all?'

That had been the position until very lately: until a week or so, or even a day or so before.

But for more than a fortnight this Army had been what amounted to on the run. It retreated with some personal stubbornness and upon prepared positions, but these prepared positions were taken with such great speed and method by the opposing forces attacking it, that hostilities had assumed the aspect almost of a war of movement. For this these troops were singularly ill-adapted, their training having been almost purely that suited for the process of attrition known as trench-warfare. In fact, though good with bombs and even with the bayonet, and though courageous and composed when not in action, these troops were singularly inept when it was a matter of keeping in communication with the units on either side of them, or even within their own unit, and they had practically no experience in the use of the rifle when in motion. To both these branches the Enemy had devoted untiring attention all through the period of relative inaction of the winter that had now closed, and in both particulars their troops, though by now apparently inferior in morale, were remarkably superior. So it appeared to be merely a matter of waiting for a period of easterly winds for this Army to be pushed into the North Sea. The easterly winds were needed for the use of the gas without which, in the idea of the German leaders, it was impossible to attack.

The position, nevertheless, had been desperate and remained desperate, and standing there in the complete tranquillity and inaction of an April morning with a slight westerly breeze, Tietjens realized that he was experiencing what were the emotions of an army practically in flight. So at least he saw it. The use of gas had always been extremely disliked by the enemy's men, and its employment in cylinders had long since been abandoned. But the German Higher Staff persisted in preparing their attacks by dense

screens of gas put over by huge plasterings of shells. These screens the enemy forces refused to enter if the wind blew in their direction.

There had come in, then, the factor which caused him himself to feel particular discomfort.

The fact that the battalion was remarkably ably commanded and unusually well-disciplined had not, of course, been overlooked by either brigade or division. And the brigade, too, happened to be admirable. Thus—these things did happen even in the confused periods that preceded the final breaking up of trench warfare—the brigade was selected to occupy positions where the enemy divisions might be expected to be hottest in attack, the battalion was selected to occupy the hottest points in that hottest sector of the line. The chickens of the C.O.'s efficiency had come home to roost.

It had been, as Tietjens felt all over his body, nearly more than flesh and blood could stand. Do what the C.O. had been able to do to husband his men, and do what discipline could do to aid in the process, the battalion was reduced to not more than a third of what would have been a reasonable strength for the position it had had to occupy—and to abandon. And it was small comfort to the men that the Wiltshires on their right and the Cheshires on their left were in far worse case. So the aspect of the Old Man as a b——y h——ll of a pusher became foremost in their considerations.

To a sensitive officer—and all good officers in this respect are sensitive—the psychology of the men makes itself felt in innumerable ways. He can afford to be blind to the feelings of his officers, for officers have to stand so much at the hands of their seniors before the rules of the service give them a chance to retaliate, that it takes a really bad Colonel to put his own mess in a bad way. As officer you *have* to jump to your C.O.'s orders, to applaud his sentiments, to smile at his lighter witticisms and to guffaw at those that are more gross. That is the Service. With the Other Ranks it is different. A discreet warrant-

officer will discreetly applaud his officer's eccentricities and good humours, as will a Sergeant desirous of promotion; but the rank and file are under no such compulsion. As long as a man comes to attention when spoken to that is all that can be expected of him. He is under no obligation to understand his officer's witticisms, so he can still less be expected to laugh at or to repeat them with gusto. He need not even come very smartly at attention. . . .

And for some days the rank and file of the battalion had gone dead, and the C.O. was aware that it had gone dead. Of the various types of Field-Officer upon whom he could have modelled himself as regards the men he had chosen that of the genial, rubicund, slightly whiskeyfied C.O. who finished every sentence with the words: 'Eh, what?' . . . In him it was a perfectly cold-blooded game for the benefit of the senior non-commissioned officers and the Other Ranks, but it had gradually become automatic.

For some days now, this mannerism had refused to work. It was as if Napoleon the Great had suddenly found that the device of pinching the ear of a grenadier on parade had suddenly become ineffective. After the 'Eh, what!' like a pistol shot the man to whom it was addressed had not all but shuffled, nor had any other men within earshot tittered and whispered to their pals. They had all remained just loutish. And it is a considerable test of courage to remain loutish under the Old Man's eyes!

All this the C.O. knew by the book, having been through it. And Tietjens knew that the C.O. knew it; and he half suspected that the C.O. knew that he, Tietjens, knew it. . . . And that the Pals and the Other Ranks also knew: that, in fact, everyone knew that everyone knew. It was like a nightmare game of bridge with all hands exposed and all the players ready to snatch pistols from their hip-pockets. . . .

And Tietjens, for his sins, now held the trump card and was in play!

It was a loathsome position. He loathed having to decide

the fate of the C.O. as he loathed the prospect of having to restore the *morale* of the men—if they survived.

And he was faced now by the conviction that he could do it. If he hadn't felt himself get his hand in with that dozen of disreputable tramps he would not have felt that he could do it. Then he must have used his moral authority with the doctor to get the Old Man patched up, drugged up, bucked up, sufficiently to carry the battalion at least to the end of the retreat of the next few days. It was obvious that that must be done if there was no one else to take command—no one else that was pretty well certain to handle the men all right. But if there *was* anyone else to take over, didn't the C.O.'s condition make it too risky to let him remain in authority? Did it, or didn't it? Did it, or didn't it?

Looking at McKechnie coolly as if to see where next he should plant his fist he had thus speculated. And he was aware that at the most dreadful moment of his whole life his besetting sin, as the saying is, was getting back on him. With the dreadful dread of the approaching *strafe* all over him, with a weight on his forehead, his eyebrows, his heavily labouring chest, he had to take . . . Responsibility. And to realize that he was a fit person to take responsibility.

He said to McKechnie:

'The M.O. is the person who has to dispose of the Colonel.'

McKechnie exclaimed:

'By God, if that drunken little squirt dares. . . .'

Tietjens said:

'Derry will act along the lines of my suggestions. He doesn't have to take orders from me. But he has said that he will act along the lines of my suggestions. I shall accept the moral responsibility.'

He felt the desire to pant: as if he had just drunk at a draft a too great quantity of liquid. He did not pant. He looked at his wrist-watch. Of the time he had decided to give McKechnie thirty seconds remained.

McKechnie made wonderful use of the time. The

Germans sent over several shells. Not such very long distance shells either. For ten seconds McKechnie went mad. He was always going mad. He was a bore. If that were only the German customary pooping off. . . . But it was heavier. Unusual obscenities dropped from the lips of McKechnie. There was no knowing where the German projectiles were going. Or aimed at. A steam laundry in Bailleul as like as not. He said:

‘Yes! Yes! Aranjuez!’

The tiny subaltern had peeped again, with his comic hat, round the corner of the pinkish gravel buttress. . . . A good, nervous boy. Imagining that the fact that he had reported had not been noticed! The gravel certainly looked more pink now the sun was come up. . . . It was rising on Bemer-ton! Or perhaps not so far to the west yet. The parsonage of George Herbert, author, of *Sweet day so cool, so calm, so bright, the bridal of the earth and sky!*

It was odd where McKechnie who was still shouting got his words for unnatural vice. He had been Latin Prize Man. But he was probably quite pure. The words very likely meant nothing to him. . . . As to the Tommies! . . . Then, why did they use them!

The German artillery thumped on! Heavier than the usual salvoes with which methodically they saluted the dawn. But there were no shells falling in that neighbourhood. So it might not be the barrage opening the Great *Strafe!* Very likely they were being visited by some little German Prince and wanted to show him what shooting was. Or by Field-Marshal Count von Brunkersdorf! Who had ordered them to shoot down the chimney of the Bailleul steam laundry. Or it might be sheer irresponsibility such as distinguished all gunners. Few Germans were imaginative enough to be irresponsible, but no doubt their gunners were more imaginative than other Germans.

He remembered being up in the artillery O.P.—what the devil was its name?—before Albert. On the Albert-Bécourt-Bécordel Road! What the *devil* was its name? A gunner had been looking through his glasses. He had said to Tiet-

jens: 'Look at that fat . . . !' And through the glasses lent him, Tietjens had seen, on a hillside in the direction of Martinpuich, a fat Hun, in shirt and trousers, carrying in his right hand a food tin from which he was feeding himself with his left. A fat, lousy object: suggesting an angler on a quiet day. The gunner had said to Tietjens:

'Keep your glass on him!'

And they had chased that miserable German about that naked hillside, with shells, for ten minutes. Whichever way he bolted, they put a shell in front of him. Then they let him go. His action, when he had realized that they were really attending to him, had been exactly that of a rabbit dodging out of the wheat the reapers have just reached. At last he just lay down. He wasn't killed. They had seen him get up and walk off later. Still carrying his bait can!

His antics had afforded those gunners infinite amusement. It afforded them almost more when all the German artillery on that front, imagining that God knew what was the matter, had awakened and plastered heaven and earth and everything between for a quarter of an hour with every imaginable kind of missile. And had then, abruptly, shut up. . . . Yes. . . . Irresponsible people, gunners!

The incident had really occurred because Tietjens had happened to ask that gunner how much he imagined it had cost in shells to smash to pieces an indescribably smashed field of twenty acres that lay between Bazentin-le-petit and Mametz Wood. The field was unimaginably smashed, pulverized, powdered. . . . The gunner had replied that with shells from all the forces employed it might have cost three million sterling. Tietjens asked how many men the gunner imagined might have been killed there. The gunner said he didn't begin to know. None at all, like as not! No one was very likely to have been strolling about there for pleasure, and it hadn't contained any trenches. It was just a field. Nevertheless, when Tietjens had remarked that in that case two Italian labourers with a steam plough could have pulverized that field about as completely for, say, thirty shillings the gunner had taken it

quite badly. He had made his men poop off after that inoffensive Hun with the bait can, just to show what artillery *can* do.

... At that point Tietjens had remarked to McKechnie:

'For my part, I shall advise the M.O. to recommend that the Colonel should be sent back on sick leave for a couple of months. It is within his power to do that.'

McKechnie had exhausted all his obscene expletives. He was thus sane. His jaw dropped:

'Send the C.O. back!' he exclaimed lamentably. 'At the very moment when ...'

Tietjens exclaimed:

'Don't be an ass. Or don't imagine that I'm an ass. No one is going to reap any glory. In this Army. Here and now!'

McKechnie said:

'But what price the money? Command pay! Nearly four quid a day. You could do with two-fifty quid at the end of his two months!'

Not so very long ago it would have seemed impossible that any man *could* speak to him about either his private financial affairs or his intimate motives.

He said:

'I have obvious responsibilities. ...'

'Some say,' McKechnie went on, 'that you're a b——y millionaire. One of the richest men in England. Giving coal mines to duchesses. So they say. Some say you're such a pauper that you hire your wife out to generals. ... Any generals. That's how you get your jobs.'

To that Tietjens had had to listen before. ...

Max Redoubt. ... It had come suddenly on to his tongue—just as, before, the name of Bemerton had come, belatedly. The name of the artillery observation post between Albert and Bécourt-Bécordel had been Max Redoubt! During the intolerable waitings of that half-forgotten July and August the name had been as familiar on his lips as ... say, as Bemerton itself. ... When I forget thee, oh my Bemerton ... or, oh my Max Redoubt ... may my right

hand forget its cunning! . . . The unforgettables! . . . Yet he had forgotten them! . . .

If only for a time he had forgotten them. Then, his right hand might forget its cunning. If only for a time. . . . But even that might be disastrous: might come at a disastrous moment. . . . The Germans had suppressed themselves. Perhaps they had knocked down the laundry chimney. Or hit some G.S. wagons loaded with coal. . . . At any rate, that was not the usual morning *strafe*. That was to come. Sweet day so cool—began again.

McKechnie hadn't suppressed himself. He was going to get suppressed. He had just been declaring that Tietjens had not displayed any chivalry in not reporting the C.O. if he, Tietjens, considered him to be drunk—or even chronically alcoholic. No chivalry. . . .

This was like a nightmare! . . . No it wasn't. It was like fever when things appear stiffly unreal. . . . And exaggeratedly real! Stereoscopic, you might say!

McKechnie with an accent of sardonic hate begged to remind Tietjens that if he considered the C.O. to be a drunkard he ought to have him put under arrest. King's Regs exacted that. But Tietjens was too cunning. He meant to have that two-fifty quid. He might be a poor man and need it. Or a millionaire, and mean. They said that was how millionaires became millionaires: by snapping up trifles of money that, God knows, would be godsend to people like himself, McKechnie.

It occurred to Tietjens that two hundred and fifty pounds, after this was over, might be a godsend to himself in a manner of speaking. And then he thought:

'Why the devil shouldn't I earn it?'

What was he going to do? After this was over.

And it was going over. Every minute the Germans were not advancing they were losing. Losing the power to advance. . . . Now, this minute! It was exciting.

'No!' McKechnie said. 'You're too cunning. If you got poor Bill cashiered for drunkenness you'd have no chance of commanding. They'd put in another pukka colonel. As a

stop-gap, whilst Bill's on sick leave, you're pretty certain to get it. That's why you're doing the damnable thing you're doing.'

Tietjens had a desire to go and wash himself. He felt physically dirty.

Yet what McKechnie said was true enough! It was true! . . . The mechanical impulse to divest himself of money was so strong that he began to say:

'In that case . . .' He was going to finish: 'I'll *get* the damned fellow cashiered.' But he didn't.

He was in a beastly hole. But decency demanded that he shouldn't act in panic. He had a mechanical, normal panic that made him divest himself of money. Gentlemen don't earn money. Gentlemen, as a matter of fact, don't do anything. They exist. Perfuming the air like Madonna lilies. Money comes into them as air through petals and foliage. Thus the world is made better and brighter. And, of course, thus political life can be kept clean! . . . So you can't make money.

But look here: this Unit was the critical spot of the whole affair. The weak spots of Brigade, Division, Army, British Expeditionary Force, Allied Forces. . . . If the Hun went through there. . . . *Fuit Ilium et magna gloria*. . . . Not much glory!

He was bound to do his best for that unit. That poor b——y unit. And for the poor b——y knockabout comedians to whom he had lately promised tickets for Drury Lane at Christmas. . . . The poor devils had said they preferred the Shoreditch Empire or the old Balham. . . . That was typical of England. The Lane was the *locus classicus* of the race, but these rag-time . . . heroes, call them heroes!—preferred Shoreditch and Balham!

An immense sense of those grimy, shuffling, grouching, dirty-nosed pantomime-supers came over him and an intense desire to give them a bit of luck, and he said:

'Captain McKechnie, you can fall out. And you will return to duty. Your own duty. In proper head-dress.'

McKechnie, who had been talking, stopped with his head on one side like a listening magpie. He said:

'What's this? What's this?' stupidly. Then he remarked: 'Oh, well, I suppose if you're in command . . .'

Tietjens said:

'It's usual to say "sir," when addressing a senior officer on parade. Even if you don't belong to his unit.'

McKechnie said:

'Don't belong! . . . *I* don't. . . . To the poor b——y old pals! . . .'

Tietjens said:

'You're attached to Division Headquarters, and you'll get back to it. Now! At once! . . . And you won't come back here. Not while I'm in command. . . . Fall out. . . .'

That was really a duty—a feudal duty!—performed for the sake of rag-time fellows. They wanted to be rid—and at once!—of dipsomaniacs in command of that unit and having the disposal of their lives. . . . Well, the moment McKechnie had uttered the words: 'The poor b——y old pals,' an illuminating flash had presented Tietjens with the conviction that, alone, the C.O. was too damn good an officer to appear a dipsomaniac, even if he were observably drunk quite often. But, seen together with his fellow McKechnie, the two of them must present a formidable appearance of being alcoholic lunatics!

The rest of the poor b——y old pals didn't really any more exist. They were a tradition—of ghosts! Four of them were dead: four in hospital: two awaiting court-martial for giving stumer cheques. The last of them, practically, if you excepted McKechnie, was the collection of putrescence and rags at that moment hanging in the wire apron. . . . The whole complexion of Headquarters would change with the going of McKechnie.

He considered with satisfaction that he would command a very decent lot. The Adjutant was so inconspicuous you did not even notice him. Beady-eyed, like a bird! Always preoccupied. And little Aranjuez, the signalling officer! And a fat fellow called Dunne, who had represented Intel-

ligence since the Night Before Last! 'A' Company Commander was fifty, thin as a pipe-stem and bald; 'B' was a good, fair boy, of good family; 'C' and 'D' were subalterns, just out. But clean. . . . Satisfactory!

What a handful of frail grass with which to stop an aperture in the dam of—of the Empire! Damn the Empire! It was England! It was Bemerton Parsonage that mattered! What did we want with an Empire! It was only a jerry-building Jew like Disraeli that could have provided us with that jerry-built name! The Tories said they had to have someone to do their dirty work. . . . Well: they'd had it!

He said to McKechnie:

'There's a fellow called Bemer—I mean Griffiths, O Eleven Griffiths, I understand you're interested in for the Divisional Follies. I'll send him along to you as soon as he's had his breakfast. He's first-rate with the cornet.'

McKechnie said:

'Yes sir,' saluted rather limply and took a step.

That was McKechnie all over. He never brought his mad fits to a crisis. That made him still more of a bore. His face would be distorted like that of a wild-cat in front of its kittens' hole in a stone wall. But he became the submissive subordinate. Suddenly! Without rhyme or reason!

Tiring people! Without manners! . . . They would presumably run the world now. It would be a tiresome world.

McKechnie, however, was saluting. He held a sealed envelope, rather small and crumpled, as if from long carrying. He was talking in a controlled voice after permission asked. He desired Tietjens to observe that the seal on the envelope was unbroken. The envelope contained 'The Sonnet'.

McKechnie must, then, have gone mad! His eyes, if his voice was quiet, though with an Oxford-Cockney accent—his prune-coloured eyes were certainly mad. . . . Hot prunes!

Men shuffled along the trenches, carrying by rope-handles very heavy, lead-coloured wooden cases: two men to each case. Tietjens said:

'You're "D" Company? . . . Get a move on!' . . .

McKechnie, however, wasn't mad. He was only pointing out that he could pit his Intellect and his Latinity against those of Tietjens: that he could do it when the great day came!

The envelope, in fact, contained a sonnet. A sonnet Tietjens, for distraction, had written to rhymes dictated by McKechnie . . . for distraction in a moment of stress. . . .

Several moments of stress they had been in together. It ought to have formed a bond between them. It hadn't. . . . Imagine having a bond with a Highland-Oxford-Cockney!

Or perhaps it had! There was certainly the sonnet. Tietjens had written it in two and a half minutes, he remembered, to stave off the thought of his wife who was then being a nuisance. . . . Two and a half minutes of forgetting Sylvia! A bit of luck! . . . But McKechnie had insisted on regarding it as a challenge. A challenge to his Latinity. He had then and there undertaken to turn that sonnet into Latin hexameters in two minutes. Or perhaps four

But things had got in the way. A fellow called Og Morgan had got himself killed over their feet. In the hut. Then they had been busy: with the Draft!

Apparently McKechnie had sealed up that sonnet in an envelope. In *that* envelope. Then and there. Apparently McKechnie had been inspired with a blind, Celtic, snorting rage to prove that he was better as a Latinist than Tietjens as a sonneteer. Apparently he was still so inspired. He was mad to engage in competition with Tietjens.

It was perhaps that that made him not quite mad. He kept sane in order to be fit for this competition. He was now repeating, holding out the envelope, seal upwards:

'I suppose you believe I have not read your sonnet, sir. I suppose you believe I have not read your sonnet, sir. . . . To prepare myself to translate it more quickly.'

Tietjens said:

'Yes! No! . . . I don't care.'

He couldn't tell the fellow that the idea of a competition

was loathsome to him. Any sort of competition was loathsome to Tietjens. Even competitive games. He liked playing tennis. Real tennis. But he very rarely played because he couldn't get fellows to play with, that beating would not be disagreeable. . . . And it would be loathsome to be drawn into any sort of competition with this Prize-man . . . They were moving very slowly along the trench, McKechnie retreating sideways and holding out the seal.

'It's your seal, sir!' he was repeating. 'Your own seal. You see, it isn't broken. . . . You don't perhaps imagine that I read the sonnet quickly and made a copy from memory?'

. . . The fellow wasn't even a decent Latinist. Or versemaker, though he was always boasting about it to the impossible, adenoidy, Cockney subalterns who made up the battalion's mess. He would translate their chits into Latin verse. . . . But it was always into tags. Generally from the Aeneid. Like:

'Conticuere omnes', or 'Vino somnoque sepultum!'

That was, presumably, what Oxford of just before the War was doing.

He said:

'I'm not a beastly detective. . . . Yes, of course, I quite believe it.'

He thought of emerging into the society of little Aranjuez who was some sort of gentle earnest Levantine with pleasure. Think of thinking of a Levantine with pleasure!

He said:

'Yes. It's all right, McKechnie.'

He felt himself solid. He was really in a competition with this fellow. It was deterioration. He, Tietjens, was crumpling up morally. He had accepted responsibility: he had thought of two hundred and fifty pounds with pleasure: now he was competing with a Cockney-Celtic-Prizeman. He was reduced to that level. . . . Well, as like as not he would be dead before the afternoon. And no one would know.

Think of thinking about whether any one would know or no! . . . But it was Valentine Wannop that wasn't to

know. That he had deteriorated under the strain! . . . That enormously surprised him. He said to his subconscious self:

‘What! Is *that* still there!’

That girl was at least an admirable Latinist. He remarked, with a sort of sardonic glee that, years before, in a dog-cart, emerging from mist, somewhere in Sussex—Udimore!—she had made him look silly. Over Catullus! Him, Tietjens! . . . Shortly afterwards old Campion had run into them with his motor that he couldn’t drive but *would* drive.

McKechnie, apparently assuaged, said:

‘I don’t know if you know, sir, that General Campion is to take over his Army the day after to-morrow. . . . But, of course, you would know.’

Tietjens said:

‘No. I didn’t. . . . You fellows in touch with Headquarters get to hear of things long before us.’ He added:

‘It means that we shall be getting reinforcements. . . . It means the Single Command.’

IV

It meant that the end of the war was in sight.

In the next sector, in front of the Headquarters’ dug-out sacking they found only Second-Lieutenant Aranjuez and Lance-Corporal Duckett of the Orderly Room. Both good boys: the Lance-Corporal, with very long graceful legs. He picked up his feet well, but continually rubbed his ankles with his shoe when he talked earnestly. Somebody’s bastard.

McKechnie plunged at once into the story of the sonnet. The Lance-Corporal had, of course, a large number of papers for Tietjens to sign. An untidy, buff and white sheaf, so McKechnie had time to talk. He wished to establish himself as on a level with the temporary C.O. At least intellectually.

He didn't. Aranjuez kept on exclaiming:

'The Major wrote a sonnet in two and a half minutes! The Major! Who would have thought it!' Ingenuous boy!

Tietjens looked at the papers with some attention. He had been so kept out of contact with the affairs of the battalion, that he wanted to know. As he had suspected, the paper business of the unit was in a shocking state. Brigade, Division, even Army and, positively, Whitehall were *strafing* for information about everything imaginable from jam, toothbrushes and braces, to religions, vaccination and barrack damages. . . . This was interesting matter. A relief to contemplate. . . . You would almost think all-wise Authority snowed under and broke the backs of Commanding Officers with papers in order to relieve their minds of affording alternative interests . . . alternative to the exigencies of active hostilities! It was certainly a relief whilst waiting for a *strafe* to come to the right stage—to have to read a violent enquiry about P.R.I. funds, whilst the battalion had been resting near a place called Béhencourt. . . .

It appeared that Tietjens might well be thankful that he had not been allowed to handle the P.R.I. funds.

The second-in-command is the titular administrator of the Regimental Institute: he is the president, supposed to attend to the men's billiard tables, almanacks, backgammon boards, football boots. . . . But the C.O. had preferred to keep these books in his own hands. Tietjens regarded that as a slight. Perhaps it had not been.

It went quickly through his head that the C.O. perhaps had financial difficulties—though that was no real affair of his. . . . The Horse Guards was pressingly interested in the pre-enlistment affairs of a private called 64 Smith. They asked violently and for the third time for particulars of his religion, previous address and real name. . . . That was no doubt the espionage at work. . . . But Whitehall was also more interested in answers to queries about the disposal of regimental funds of a training camp in January, 1915. . . . As long ago as that! The mills of God grind slowly. . . . That query was covered by a private note from the

Brigadier saying that he wished for goodness' sake the C.O. would answer these queries or there would have to be a Court of Enquiry.

These particular two papers ought not to have been brought to Tietjens. He held them between the thumb and forefinger of his left hand and the query upon 64 Smith S—which seemed rather urgent—between the first and second, and so handed them to Lance-Corporal Duckett. That nice, clean, fair boy was, at the moment, talking in intimate undertones to Second-Lieutenant Aranjuez about the resemblances between the Petrarchan and the Shakespearean sonnet form. . . .

This was what His Majesty's Expeditionary Force had come to. You had four of its warriors, four minutes before the zero of a complete advance of the whole German line, all interested in sonnets. . . . Drake and his game of bowls—in fact repeated itself! . . . Differently, of course! But times change.

He handed the two selected papers to Duckett.

'Give this one to the Commanding Officer,' he said, 'and tell the Sergeant-Major to find what Company 64 Smith is in and have him brought to me, wherever I am. . . . I'm going right along the trenches now. Come after me when you've been to the C.O. and the Sergeant-Major. Aranjuez will make notes of what I want done about revetting, you can put down anything about the personnel of the companies. . . . Get a move on!'

He told McKechnie amiably to be out of those lines forthwith. He didn't want him killed on his hands.

The sun was now shining into the trench.

He looked again through Brigade's that morning communication concerning dispositions the unit was to make in the event of the expected German attack. . . . Due to begin—the preparatory artillery at least—in three minutes' time.

Don't we say prayers before battle? . . . He could not imagine himself doing it. . . . He just hoped that nothing would happen that would make him lose control of his

mind. . . . Otherwise he found that he was meditating on how to get the paper affairs of the unit into a better state. . . . *'Who sweeps a room as for Thy cause . . .'* It was the equivalent of prayer probably. . . .

He noted that Brigade's injunctions about the coming fight were not only endorsed with earnestness by Division but also by very serious exhortations from Army. The chit from Brigade was in handwriting, that from Division in fairly clear type-script, that from Army in very pale typed characters. . . . It amounted to this: that they were that day to stick it till they burst. . . . That meant that there was nothing behind their backs—from there to the North Sea! . . . The French were hurrying along probably. . . . He imagined a lot of little blue fellows in red breeches trotting along pink, sunlit plains.

(You cannot control your imagination's pictures. Of course the French no longer wore red trousers.) He saw the line breaking just where the blue section came to: the rest, swept back into the sea. He saw the whole of the terrain behind them. On the horizon was a glistening haze. That was where they were going to be swept to. Or of course they would not be swept. They would be lying on their faces, exposing the seats of their breeches. Too negligible for the large dust-pan and broom. . . . What was death like: the immediate process of dissolution? He stuffed the papers into his tunic pocket.

He remembered with grimmish amusement that one chit promised him reinforcements. Sixteen men! Sixteen! Worcesters! From a Worcester training camp. . . . Why the deuce weren't they sent to the Worcester battalion just next door? Good fellows, no doubt. But they hadn't got the drill quiffs of our lot: they were not pals with our men: they did not know the officers by name. There would be no welcome to cheer them. . . . It was a queer idea, the deliberate destruction of regimental *esprit de corps* that the Home Authorities now insisted on. It was said to be imitated at the suggestion of a civilian of advanced social views from the French who in turn had

imitated it from the Germans. It is of course lawful to learn of the Enemy: but is it sensible?

Perhaps it is. The Feudal Spirit was broken. Perhaps it would therefore be harmful to Trench Warfare. It used to be comfortable and cosy. You fought beside men from your own hamlet under the leadership of the parson's son. Perhaps that was not good for you?

At any rate, as at present arranged, dying was a lonely affair.

He, Tietjens, and little Aranjuez there, if something hit them would die—a Yorkshire territorial magnate's son and the son of, positively, an Oporto Protestant minister, if you can imagine such a thing!—the dissimilar souls winging their way to heaven side by side. You'd think God would find it more appropriate if Yorkshiremen went with other North Country fellows, and Dagoes with other Papists. For Aranjuez, though the son of a Nonconformist of sorts, had reverted to the faith of his fathers.

He said:

'Come along, Aranjuez. . . . I want to see that wet bit of trench before the Hun shells hit it.'

Well. . . . They were getting reinforcements. The Home Authorities had awakened to their prayers. They sent them sixteen Worcesters. They would be three hundred and forty-four—no, forty-three, because he had sent back O-Eleven Griffith, the fellow with the cornet—three hundred and forty-three lonely souls against. . . . say two Divisions! Against about eighteen thousand, very likely. And they were to stick it till they burst. Reinforced!

Reinforced. Good God! . . . Sixteen Worcesters!

What was at the bottom of it all?

Campion was going to command that Army. That meant that real reinforcements had been promised from the millions of men that filled the base camps. And it meant the Single Command! Campion would not have consented to take the command of that Army if he had not had those very definite promises.

But it would take time. Months! Anything like adequate reinforcements would take months.

And at that moment, in the most crucial point of the line of the Army, of the Expeditionary Force, the Allied Forces, the Empire, the Universe, the Solar system, they had three hundred and sixty-six men commanded by the last surviving Tory. To face wave on wave of the Enemy.

In one minute the German barrage was due.

Aranjuez said to him:

'You can write a sonnet in two and a half minutes, sir. . . . And your syphon works like anything in that damp trench. . . . It took my mother's great-uncle, the canon of Oporto, fifteen weeks to finish his celebrated sonnet. I know because my mother told me. . . . But you oughtn't to be here, sir.'

Aranjuez then was the nephew of the author of the *Sonnet to Night*. He could be. You had to have that sort of oddity to make up this world. So naturally he was interested in sonnets.

And, having got hold of a battalion with a stretch of damp trench, Tietjens had had the opportunity of trying a thing he had often thought of—of drying out vertically cut, damp soil by means of a syphon of soil-pipes put in, not horizontally but vertically. Fortunately Hackett, the commander of B Company, that had the wet trench, had been an engineer in civil life. Aranjuez had been along, out of sheer hero-worship, to B trenches to see how his hero's syphons had worked. He reported that they worked like a dream.

Little Aranjuez said:

'These trenches are like Pompeii, sir.'

Tietjens had never seen Pompeii, but he understood that Aranjuez was referring to the empty square-cut excavations in the earth. Particularly to their emptiness. And to the deadly stillness in the sunlight. . . . Admirable trenches. Made to hold an establishment of several thousand men. To bustle with Cockney life. Now dead empty. They passed three sentries in the pinkish gravel passage and two

men, one with a pick, the other with a shovel. They were exactly squaring the juncture of the wall and the path, as they might have done in Pompeii. Or in Hyde Park! A perfect devil for tidiness, 'A' Comany Commander. But the men seemed to like it. They were sniggering, though they stopped that, of course when Tietjens passed...

A nice, dark, tiny boy, Aranjuez: his adoration was charming. From the very first—and naturally, frightened out of his little life, he had clung to Tietjens as a child clings to an omnipotent father. Tietjens, all-wise, could direct the awful courses of war and decree safety for the frightened! Tietjens needed that sort of worship. The boy said it would be awful to have anything happen to your eyes. Your girl naturally would not look at you. Not more than three miles away, Nancy Truefitt was now. Unless they had evacuated her. Nancy was his flame. In a tea-shop at Bailleul.

A man was sitting outside the mouth of 'A' dugout, just after they passed the mouth of the communication trench. ... Comforting that channel in the soil looked, running uphill. You could saunter away up there, out of all this. ... But you couldn't! There was no turning here either to the right or to the left!

The man writing in a copy-book had his tin hat right over his eyes. Engrossed, he sat on a gravel-step, his copy-book on his knees. His name was Slocombe and he was a dramatist. Like Shakespeare. He made fifty pounds a time writing music-hall sketches: for the outer halls. The outer halls were the cheap music-halls that go in a ring round the suburbs of London. Slocombe never missed a second, writing in his copy-books. If you fell the men out for a rest when marching Slocombe would sit by the roadside—and out would come his copy-book and his pencil. His wife would type out what he sent home. And write him grumbling letters if the supply of copy failed. How was she to keep up the Sunday best of George and Flossie if he did not keep on writing one-act sketches? Tietjens had this information through censoring one of the man's

letters containing manuscript. . . . Slocombe was slovenly as a soldier, but he kept the other men in a good humour, his mind being a perfect repertoire of Cockney jests at the expense of Big and Little Willy and Brother Fritz. Slocombe wrote on, wetting his pencil with his tongue.

The Sergeant in the mouth of 'A' Company headquarters dugout started to turn out some sort of a guard, but Tietjens stopped him. 'A' Company ran itself on the lines of regulars in the depot. The O.C. had a conduct sheet book as neat as a ledger! The old, bald, grim fellow. Tietjens asked the Sergeant questions. Had they their Mills bombs all right? They weren't short of rifles—first-class order? . . . But how could they be! Were there any sick? . . . Two! . . . Well, it was a healthy life! . . . Keep the men under cover until the Hun barrage began. It was due now.

It was due now. The second-hand of Tietjens' watch, like an animated pointer of hair, kicked a little on the stroke of the minute. . . . 'Crumb!' said the punctual, distant sound.

Tietjens said to Aranjuez:

'It's presumably coming now!' Aranjuez pulled at the chin strap of his tin hat.

Tietjens' mouth filled itself with a dreadful salty flavour, the back of his tongue being dry. His chest and heart laboured heavily. Aranjuez said:

'If I stop one, sir, you'll tell Nancy Truefitt that . . .'

Tietjens said:

'Little nippers like you don't stop things. . . . Besides, feel the wind!'

They were at the highest point of the trenches that ran along a hillside. So they were exposed. The wind had undoubtedly freshened, coming down the hill. In front and behind, along the trench, they could see views. Land, some green, greyish trees.

Aranjuez said:

'You think the wind will stop them, sir?' appealingly.

Tietjens exclaimed with gruffness:

'Of course it will stop them. They won't work without

gas. Yet their men hate to have to face the gas-screens. It's our great advantage. It saps their *moral*. Nothing else would. They can't put up smoke-screens either.'

Aranjuez said:

'I know you think their gas has ruined them, sir. . . . It was wicked of them to use it. You can't do a wicked thing without suffering for it, can you, sir?'

It remained indecently quiet. Like Sunday in a village with the people in church. But it was not pleasurable.

Tietjens wondered how long physical irregularities would inconvenience his mind. You cannot think well with a parched back to your tongue. This was practically his first day in the open during a *strafe*. His first whole day for quite a time. Since Noircourt! . . . How long ago? . . . Two years? . . . Maybe! . . . Then he had nothing to go on to tell him how long he would be inconvenienced!

It remained indecently quiet! Running footsteps, at first on duckboards, then on the dry path of trench. They made Tietjens start violently, inside himself. The house must be on fire!

He said to Aranjuez:

'Some one is in a hurry!'

The lad's teeth chattered. They must have made him feel bad too, the footsteps. . . . The knocking on the gate in 'Macbeth'!

They began. It had come. Pam . . . Pamperi . . . Pam! Pam! . . . Pa . . . Pamperi . . . Pam! Pam! . . . Pampamperi-pampampam . . . Pam . . . They were the ones that sound like drums. They continued incessantly. Immensely big drums. The ones that go at it with real zest. . . . You know how it is, looking at an opera orchestra when the fellow with the big drum-sticks really begins. Your own heart beats like hell. Tietjens' heart did. The drummer appears to go mad.

Tietjens was never much good at identifying artillery by the sound. He would have said that these were anti-aircraft guns. And he remembered that, for some minutes, the drone of plane engines had pervaded the indecent silence.

... But that drone was so normal it was part of the silence. Like your own thoughts. A filtered and engrossed sound, drifting down from overhead. More like fine dust than noise.

A familiar noise said: 'We...e...e...ry!' Shells always appeared tired of life. As if after a long, long journey they said: 'Weary!' Very much prolonging the 'e' sound. Then 'Whack!' when they burst.

This was the beginning of the *strafe*. . . . Though he had been convinced the *strafe* was coming he had hoped for a prolongation of the . . . say Bemerton! . . . conditions. The life Peaceful. And Contemplative. But here it was beginning. 'Oh well . . .'

This shell appeared heavier and to be more than usually tired. Desultory. It seemed to pass within six feet over the heads of Aranjuez and himself. Then, just twenty yards up the hill it said, invisibly, 'Dud!' . . . And it *was* a dud!

It had not, very likely, been aimed at their trench at all. It was probably just an aircraft shrapnel shell that had not exploded. The Germans were firing a great number of duds—these days.

So it might not be a sign of the beginning! It was tantalizing. But as long as it ended the right way one could bear it.

Lance-Corporal Duckett, the fair boy, ran to within two foot of Tietjens' feet and pulled up with a Guardee's stamp and a terrific salute. There was life in the old dog yet. Meaning that a zest for spit and polish survived in places in these ragtime days.

The boy said, panting—it might have been agitation, or that he had run so fast . . . But why had he run so fast if he were not agitated:

'If you please, sir,' . . . Pant. . . . 'Will you come to the Colonel?' . . . Pant. 'With as little delay as possible!' He remained panting.

It went through Tietjens' mind that he was going to spend the rest of that day in a comfortable, dark hole. Not in the blinding daylight. . . . Let us be thankful!

Leaving Lance-Corporal Duckett . . . it came suddenly into his head that he liked that boy because he suggested Valentine Wannop! . . . to converse in intimate tones with Aranjuez and so to distract him from the fear of imminent death or blindness that would mean the loss of his girl, Tietjens went smartly back along the trenches. He didn't hurry. He was determined that the men should not see him hurry. Even if the Colonel should refuse to be relieved of the command, Tietjens was determined that the men should have the consolation of knowing that Headquarters numbered one cool, sauntering soul amongst its members.

They had had, when they took over the Trasna Valley trenches before the Mametz Wood affair, a rather good Major who wore an eyeglass and was of good family. He had something the matter with him, for he committed suicide later. . . . But, as they went in, the Huns, say fifty yards away, began to shout various national battle-cries of the Allies or the melodies of regimental quicksteps of British regiments. The idea was that if they heard, say: '*Some talk of Alexander . . .*' resounding from an opposite trench, H.M. Second Grenadier Guards would burst into cheers and Brother Hun would know what he had before him.

Well, this Major Grosvenor shut his men up, naturally, and stood listening with his eyeglass screwed into his face and the air of a connoisseur at a quartette party. At last he took his eyeglass out, threw it in the air and caught it again.

'Shout, *Banzai!* men,' he said.

That, on the off-chance, might give the Enemy a scunner at the thought that we had Japanese troops in the line in front of them, or it would show them that we were making game of them, a form of offensive that sent these owlish fellows mad with rage. . . . So the Huns shut up!

That was the sort of humour in an officer that the men still liked. . . . The sort of humour Tietjens himself had not got: but he could appear unconcernedly reflective and all there—and he could tell them, at trying moments, that,

say, their ideas about skylarks were all wrong. . . . That was tranquillizing.

Once he had heard a Papist Padre preaching in a barn, under shell-fire. At any rate shells were going overhead and pigs underfoot. The Padre had preached about very difficult points in the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, and the men had listened raptly. He said that was common sense. They didn't want lachrymose or mortuary orations. They wanted their minds taken off. . . . So did the Padre!

Thus you talk to the men, just before the event, about skylarks, or the hind-legs of the elephant at the old Lane! And you don't hurry when the Colonel sends for you.

He walked along, for a moment or two, thinking nothing. The pebbles in the gravel of the trench grew clear and individual. Some one had dropped a letter. Slocombe, the dramatist, was closing his copy-book. Sighing, apparently, he reached for his rifle. 'A' Company Sergeant-Major was turning out some men of sorts. He said: 'Get a move on!' Tietjens said as he passed: 'Keep them under cover as much as you can, Sergeant-Major.'

It occurred to him suddenly that he had committed a military misdemeanour in leaving Lance-Corporal Duckett with Aranjuez. An officer should not walk along a stretch of lonely trench without escort. Some Hun offering might hit him and there would be loss of property to His Majesty. No one to fetch a doctor or stretcher-bearers while you bled to death. That was the Army. . . .

Well, he had left Duckett with Aranjuez to comfort him. That minute subaltern was suffering. God knew what little agonies ran about in his little mind, like mice! He was as brave as a lion when *strafes* were on: when they weren't, his little, blackamoor, nobbly face quivered as the thoughts visited him. . . .

He had really left Valentine Wannop with Aranjuez! That, he realized, was what he had done. The boy Duckett *was* Valentine Wannop. Clean, blonde, small: with the ordinary face, the courageous eyes, the obstinately, slightly peaked nose. . . . It was just as if, Valentine Wannop being

in his possession, they had been walking along a road and seen someone in distress. And he, Tietjens, had said:

'I've got to get along. You stop and see what you can do!'

And, amazingly, he was walking along a country road beside Valentine Wannop, silent, with the quiet intimacy that comes with possession. She belonged to him. . . . Not a mountain road: not Yorkshire. Not a valley road: not Bemerton. A country parsonage was not for him. So he wouldn't take orders!

A down-land road, with some old thorn trees. They only grew really in Kent. And the sky coming down on all sides. The flat top of a down!

Amazing! He had not thought of that girl for over a fortnight now, except in moments of great *strafes*, when he had hoped she would not be too worried if she knew where he was. Because he had the sense that, all the time, she knew where he was.

He had thought of her less and less. At longer intervals. . . . As with his nightmare of the mining Germans who desired that a candle should be brought to the Captain. At first, every night, three or four times every night, it had visited him. . . . Now it came only once every night. . . .

The physical semblance of that boy had brought the girl back to his mind. That was accidental, so it was not part of any psychological rhythm. It did not show him, that is to say, whether, in the natural course of events and without accidents, she was ceasing to obsess him.

She was certainly now obsessing him! Beyond bearing or belief. His whole being was overwhelmed by her . . . by her mentality really. For of course the physical resemblance of the Lance-Corporal was mere subterfuge. Lance-Corporals do not resemble young ladies. . . . And, as a matter of fact, he did not remember exactly what Valentine Wannop looked like. Not vividly. He had not that sort of mind. It was words that his mind found that let him know that she was fair, snub-nosed, rather broad-faced and square on her feet. As if he had made a note of it and referred to

it when he wanted to think of her. His mind didn't make any mental picture: it brought up a sort of blur of sunlight.

It was the mentality that obsessed him: the exact mind, the impatience of solecisms and facile generalizations! . . . A queer catalogue of the charms of one's lady love! . . . But he wanted to hear her say: 'Oh, chuck it, Edith Ethel!' when Edith Ethel Duchemin, now of course Lady Macmaster, quoted some of the opinions expressed in Macmaster's critical monograph about the late Mr Rossetti. . . . How *very* late now!

It would rest him to hear that. She was, in effect, the only person in the world that he wanted to hear speak. Certainly the only person in the world that he wanted to talk to. The only clear intelligence! . . . The repose that his mind needed from the crackling of thorns under all the pots of the world. . . . From the eternal, imbecile 'Pam-pamperipam Pam Pamperi Pam Pam!' of the German guns that all the while continued. . . .

Why couldn't they chuck that? What good did it do them to keep that mad drummer incessantly thundering on his stupid instrument? . . . Possibly they might bring down some of our planes, but they generally didn't. You saw the black balls of their shells exploding and slowly expand like pocket-handkerchiefs about the unconcerned planes, like black peas aimed at dragon-flies, against the blue: the illuminated, pinkish, pretty things! . . . But his dislike of those guns was just dislike—a Tory prejudice. They were probably worth while. Just. . . .

You naturally tried every argument in the unseen contest of wills that went on across the firmament.

'Ho!' says our Staff, 'they are going to attack in force at such an hour ackemma,' because naturally the staff thought in terms of ackemma years after the twenty-four-hour day had been established. 'Well, we'll send out a million machine gun planes to wipe out any men they've got moving up into support!'

It was of course unusual to move bodies of men by daylight. But this game had only two resources: you used the

usual. Or the unusual. *Usually* you didn't begin your barrage after dawn and launch your attack at ten-thirty or so. So you might do it—the Huns might be trying it on—as a surprise measure.

On the other hand, our people might be sending over the planes, whose immense droning was then making your very bones vibrate, in order to tell the Huns that we were ready to be surprised: that the time had now come round when we might be expecting the Hun brain to think out a surprise. So we sent out those deathly, dreadful things to run along just over the tops of the hedgerows, in spite of all the guns! For there was nothing more terrifying in the whole war than that span of lightness, swaying, approaching a few feet above the heads of your column of men: instinct with wrath: dispensing the dreadful rain! So we had sent them. In a moment they would be tearing down. . . .

Of course if this were merely a demonstration: if, say, there were no reinforcements moving, no troops detraining at the distant railhead, the correct Hun answer would be to hammer some of our trenches to hell with all the heavy stuff they could put on to them. That was like saying sardonically:

'God, if you interfere with our peace and quiet on a fine day we'll interfere with yours!' And . . . Kerumph . . . the wagons of coal would fly over until we recalled our planes and all went to sleep again over the chess-board. . . . You would probably be just as well off if you refrained from either demonstration or counter-demonstration. But Great General Staff liked to exchange these wittiscisms in iron. And a little blood!

A Sergeant of sorts approached him from Bn H.Q. way, shepherding a man with a head wound. His tin hat, that is to say, was perched jauntily forward over a bandage. He was Jewish-nosed, appeared not to have shaved, though he had, and appeared as if he ought to have worn pince-nez to complete his style of Oriental manhood. Private Smith. Tietjens said:

'Look here, what was your confounded occupation before the war?'

The man replied with an agreeable, cultured throaty intonation:

'I was a journalist, sir. On a Socialist paper. Extreme Left!'

'And what,' Tietjens asked, 'was your agreeable name? ... I'm obliged to ask you that question. I don't want to insult you.'

In the old regular army it was an insult to ask a private if he was not going under his real name. Most men enlisted under false names.

The man said:

'Eisenstein, sir!'

Tietjens asked if the man were a Derby recruit or compulsorily enlisted. He said he had enlisted voluntarily. Tietjens said: 'Why?' If the fellow was a capable journalist and on the right side he would be more useful outside the army. The man said he had been foreign correspondent of a Left paper. Being correspondent of a Left paper with a name like Eisenstein deprived one of one's chance of usefulness. Besides he wanted to have a whack at the Prussians. He was of Polish extraction. Tietjens asked the Sergeant if the man had a good record. The Sergeant said: 'First-class man. First-class soldier.' He had been recommended for the D.C.M. Tietjens said:

'I shall apply to have you transferred to the Jewish regiment. In the meantime you can go back to the First Line Transport. You shouldn't have been a Left journalist and have a name like Eisenstein. One or the other. Not both.' The man said the name had been inflicted on his ancestry in the Middle Ages. He would prefer to be called Esau, as a son of that tribe. He pleaded not to be sent to the Jewish regiment, which was believed to be in Mesopotamia, just when the fighting there was at its most interesting.

'You're probably thinking of writing a book,' Tietjens said. 'Well, there are all Abana and Pharpar to write about. I'm sorry. But you're intelligent enough to see that I can't

take . . . ' He stopped, fearing that if the Sergeant heard any more the men might make it hot for the fellow as a suspect. He was annoyed at having asked his name before the Sergeant. He appeared to be a good man. Jews could fight. . . . And hunt! . . . But he wasn't going to take any risks. The man, dark-eyed and erect, flinched a little, gazing into Tietjens' eyes.

'I suppose you can't, sir,' he said. 'It's a disappointment. I'm not writing anything. I want to go on in the Army. I like the life.'

Tietjens said:

'I'm sorry, Smith. I can't help it. Fall out!' He was sorry. He believed the fellow. But responsibility hardens the heart. It must. A very short time ago he would have taken trouble over that fellow. A great deal of trouble, very likely. Now he wasn't going to. . . .

A large capital 'A' in whitewash decorated the piece of corrugated iron that was derelictly propped against a channel at right angles to the trench. To Tietjens' astonishment a strong impulse like a wave of passion influenced his being towards the left—up that channel. It wasn't funk: it wasn't any sort of funk. He had been rather irritatedly wrapped up in the case of Private Smith-Eisenstein. It had undeniably irritated him to have to break the chances of a Jew and Red Socialist. It was the sort of thing one did not do if one were omnipotent—as he was. Then . . . this strong impulse? . . . It was a passionate desire to go where you could find exact intellect: rest.

He thought he suddenly understood. For the Lincolnshire Sergeant-Major the word Peace meant that a man could stand up on a hill. For him it meant someone to talk to.

V

The Colonel said:

'Look here, Tietjens, lend me two hundred and fifty quid. They say you're a damn beastly rich fellow. My

accounts are all out. I've got a loathsome complaint. My friends have all gone back on me. I shall have to face a Court of Enquiry if I go home. But my nerve's gone. I've got to go home.'

He added:

'I daresay you knew all that.'

From the sudden fierce hatred that he felt at the thought of giving money to this man, Tietjens knew that his inner mind based all his calculations on the idea of living with Valentine Wannop . . . when men could stand up on hills.

He had found the Colonel in his cellar—it really, actually was a cellar, the remains of a farm—sitting on the edge of his camp-bed, in his shorts, his khaki shirt very open at the neck. His eyes were a little bloodshot, but his cropped, silver-grey hair was accurately waved, his grey moustache beautifully pointed. His silver-backed hair-brushes and a small mirror were indeed on the table in front of him. By the rays of the lamp that, hung overhead, rendered that damp stone place faintly nauseating, he looked keen, clean and resolute. Tietjens wondered how he would look by daylight. He had remarkably seldom seen the fellow by daylight. Beside the mirror and the brushes lay, limply, an unfilled pipe, a red pencil and the white buff papers from Whitehall that Tietjens had already read.

He had begun by looking at Tietjens with a keen, hard, bloodshot glance. He had said:

'You think you can command this battalion? Have you any experience? It appears you suggest that I take two months' leave.'

Tietjens had expected a violent outbreak. Threats even. None had come. The Colonel had continued to regard him with intentness, nothing more. He sat motionless, his long arms, bare to the elbow, dependent over each of his knees which were far apart. He said that if he decided to go he didn't want to leave his battalion to a man that would knock it about. He continued staring hard at Tietjens. The phrase was singular in that place and at that hour, but

Tietjens understood it to mean that he did not want his battalion discipline to go to pieces.

Tietjens answered that he did not think he would let the discipline go to pieces. The Colonel had said:

'How do you know? You're no soldier, are you?'

Tietjens said he had commanded in the line a Company at full strength—nearly as large as the battalion and, out of it, a unit of exactly eight times its present strength. He did not think any complaints had been made of him. The Colonel said, frostily:

'Well! I know nothing about you.' He had added:

'You seem to have moved the battalion all right the night before last. I wasn't in a condition to do it myself. I'm not well. I'm obliged to you. The men appear to like you. They're tired of me.'

Tietjens felt himself on tenterhooks. He had, now, a passionate desire to command that battalion. It was the last thing he would have expected of himself. He said:

'If it becomes a question of a war of motion, sir, I don't know that I should have much experience.'

The Colonel answered:

'It won't become a war of motion before I come back. If I ever do come back.'

Tietjens said:

'Isn't it rather like a war of motion now, sir?' It was perhaps the first time in his life he had ever asked for information from a superior in rank—with an implicit belief that he would get an exact answer. The Colonel said:

'No. This is only falling back on prepared positions. There will be positions prepared for us right back to the sea. If the Staff has done its work properly. If it hasn't, the war's over. We're done, finished, smashed, annihilated, non-existent.'

Tietjens said:

'But if the great *strafe* that, according to Division, is due now . . .'

The Colonel said: 'What?' Tietjens repeated his words and added:

'We might get pushed beyond the next prepared position.'

The Colonel appeared to withdraw his thoughts from a great distance.

'There isn't going to be any great *strafe*,' he said. He was beginning to add: 'Division has got. . . .' A considerable thump shook the hill behind their backs. The Colonel sat listening without much attention. His eyes gloomily rested on the papers before him. He said, without looking up:

'Yes: I don't want my battalion knocked about!' He went on reading again—the communication from Whitehall. He said: 'You've read this?' and then:

'Falling back on prepared positions isn't the same as moving in the open. You don't have to do more than you do in a trench-to-trench attack. I suppose you can get your direction by compass all right. Or get someone to, for you.'

Another considerable crump of sound shook the earth but from a little further away. The Colonel turned the sheet of paper over. Pinned to the back of it was the private note of the Brigadier. He perused this also with gloomy and unsurprised eyes.

'Pretty stiff, all this,' he said. 'You've read it? I shall have to go back and see about this.'

He exclaimed:

'It's rough luck. I should have liked to leave my battalion to someone that knew it. I don't suppose you do. Perhaps you do, though.'

An immense collection of fire-irons: all the fire-irons in the world fell just above their heads. The sound seemed to prolong itself in echoes, though of course it could not have. It was repeated.

The Colonel looked upwards negligently. Tietjens proposed to go to see. The Colonel said:

'No, don't. Notting will tell us if anything's wanted. . . . Though nothing can be wanted!' Notting was the beady-eyed Adjutant in the adjoining cellar. 'How could they expect us to keep accounts straight in August 1914? How can they expect me to remember what happened? At the

Depot. Then!' He appeared listless, but without resentment. 'Rotten luck . . .' he said. 'In the battalion and . . . with this!' He rapped the back of his hand on the papers. He looked up at Tietjens.

'I suppose I could get rid of you; with a bad report,' he said. 'Or perhaps I couldn't . . . General Campion put you here. You're said to be his bastard.'

'He's my godfather,' Tietjens said. 'If you put in a bad report of me I should not protest. That is, if it were on the grounds of lack of experience. I should go to the Brigadier over anything else.'

'It's the same thing,' the Colonel said, 'I mean a godson. If I had thought you were General Campion's bastard, I should not have said it. . . . No; I don't want to put in a bad report of you. It's my own fault if you don't know the battalion. I've kept you out of it. I didn't want you to see what a rotten state the papers are in. They say you're the devil of a paper soldier. You used to be in a Government office, didn't you?'

Heavy blows were being delivered to the earth with some regularity on each side of the cellar. It was as if a boxer of the size of a mountain were delivering rights and lefts in heavy alternation. And it made hearing rather difficult.

'Rotten luck,' the Colonel said. 'And McKechnie's dotty. Clean dotty.' Tietjens missed some words. He said that he would probably be able to get the paper work of the battalion straight before the Colonel came back.

The noise rolled down hill like a heavy cloud. The Colonel continued talking and Tietjens, not being very accustomed to his voice, lost a good deal of what he said but, as if in a rift, he did hear:

'I'm not going to burn my fingers with a bad report on you that may bring a General on my back—to get back McKechnie who's dotty. . . . Not fit to. . . .'

The noise rolled in again. Once the Colonel listened to it, turning his head on one side and looking upwards. But he appeared satisfied with what he heard and recommenced his perusal of the Horse Guards letter. He took the pencil,

underlined words and then sat idly stabbing the paper with the point.

With every minute Tietjens' respect for him increased. This man at least knew his job—as an engine-dresser does, or the captain of a steam tramp. His nerves might have gone to pieces. They probably had; probably he could not go very far without stimulants: he was probably under bromides now.

And, all things considered, his treatment of Tietjens had been admirable and Tietjens had to revise his view of it. He realized that it was McKechnie who had given him the idea that the Colonel hated him: but he would not have said anything. He was too old a hand in the Army to give Tietjens a handle by saying anything definite. . . . And he had always treated Tietjens with a sort of monumental deference that, in a Mess, the Colonel should bestow on his chief assistant. Going through a door at meal-times, for instance, if they happened to be side by side, he would motion with his hand for Tietjens to go first, naturally though, taking his proper precedence when Tietjens halted. And here he was, perfectly calm. And quite ready to be instructive.

Tietjens was not calm: he was too much bothered by Valentine Wannop and by the thought that, if the *strafe* was on, he ought to be seeing about his battalion. And of course by the bombardment. But the Colonel said, when Tietjens with the aid of signs again made proposals to take a look around:

'No. Stop where you are. This isn't the *strafe*. There is not going to be a *strafe*. This is only a little extra Morning Hate. You can tell by the noise. That's only four point two's. There's nothing really heavy. The really heavies don't come so fast. They'll be turning on to the Worcesters now and only giving us one every half minute. . . . That's their game. If you don't know that, what are you doing here?' He added: 'You hear?' pointing his forefinger to the roof. The noise shifted. It went away to the right as a slow coal-wagon might. He went on:

'This is your place. Not doing things up above. They'll come and tell you if they want things. And you've got a first-rate Adjutant in Notting and Dunne's a good man. . . . The men are all under cover: that's an advantage in having your strength down to three hundred. There's dugouts for all and to spare. . . . All the same, this is no place for you. Nor for me. This is a young man's war. We're old uns. Three and a half years of it have done for me. Three and a half months will do for you.'

He looked gloomily at his reflection in the mirror that stood before him.

'You're a gone coon!' he said to it. Then he took it and holding it for a moment poised at the end of a bare white arm, flung it violently at the rough stones of the wall behind Tietjens. The fragments tinkled to the ground.

'There's seven years' bad luck,' he said. 'God take 'em, if they can give me seven years worse than this last I'd find it instructive!'

He looked at Tietjens with infuriated eyes.

'Look here you!' he said, 'you're an educated man . . . What's the worst thing about this war? What's the *worst* thing? Tell me that!' His chest began to heave. 'It's that they won't let us alone. Never! Not one of us! If they'd let us alone we could fight. But never. . . . No one! It's not only the beastly papers of the battalion, though I'm no good with papers. Never was and never shall be. . . . But it's the people at home. One's own people. God help us, you'd think that when a poor devil was in the trenches they'd let him alone. . . . Damn it: I've had solicitors' letters about family quarrels when I was in hospital. Imagine that! . . . Imagine it! I don't mean tradesmen's dunnings. But one's own people. I haven't even got a bad wife as McKechnie has and they say you have. My wife's a bit extravagant and the children are expensive. That's worry enough. . . . But my father died eighteen months ago. He was in partnership with my uncle. A builder. And they tried to do his estate out of his share of the business and leave my old mother with nothing. And my brother and sister threw the

estate into Chancery in order to get back the little bit my father spent on my wife and children. My wife and children lived with my father whilst I was in India. . . . And out here. . . . My solicitor says they can get it out of my share: the cost of their keep. He calls it the doctrine of ademption. . . . Ademption . . . Doctrine of . . . I was better off as a Sergeant,' he added gloomily. 'But Sergeants don't get let alone. They've always got women after them. Or their wives take up with Belgians and they get written to about it. Sergeant Cutts of "D" Company gets an anonymous letter every week about his wife. How's he to do his duty! But he does. So have I till now. . . .' He added with renewed violence:

'Look here. You're an educated man, aren't you? The sort of man that could write a book. You write a book about that. You write to the papers about it. You'd be more use to the Army doing that than being here. I daresay you're a good enough officer. Old Campion is too keen a commander to stick a rotten officer into this job, godson or no godson. . . . Besides, I don't believe the whole story about you. If a General wanted to give a soft godson's job to a fellow, it would be a soft job and a fat one. He wouldn't send him here. So take the battalion with my blessing. You won't worry over it more than I have: the poor bloody Glamorgans.'

So he had his battalion! He drew an immense breath. The bumps began to come back along the line. He figured those shells as being like sparrow-hawks beating along a hedge. They were probably pretty accurate. The Germans were pretty accurate. The trenches were probably being knocked about a good deal, the pretty, pinkish gravel falling about in heaps as it would lie in a park, ready to be spread on paths. He remembered how he had been up on the Montagne Noire, still, thank God, behind where they were now. Why did he thank God? Did he really care where the Army was. Probably! But enough to say 'thank God' about? Probably too. . . . But as long as they kept on at the job did anything matter? Anything else?

It was keeping on that mattered. From the Montagne Noire he had seen our shells bursting on a thinnish line in the distance, in shining weather. Each shell existing in a white puff, beautifully. Forward and backward along the line. . . . Under Messines village. He had felt exhilaration to think that our gunners were making such good practice. Now some Hun on a hill was feeling exhilaration over puffs of smoke in our line! . . . But he, Tietjens, was . . . Damn it, he was going to make two hundred and fifty quid towards living with Valentine Wannop—when you really *could* stand up on a hill . . . anywhere!

The Adjutant, Notting, looked in and said:

‘Brigade wants to know if we’re suffering any, sir?’

The Colonel surveyed Tietjens with irony:

‘Well, what are you going to report?’ he asked. . . . ‘This officer is taking over from me,’ he said to Notting. Notting’s beady eyes and red-varnished cheeks expressed no emotions.

‘Oh, tell Brigade,’ the Colonel said, ‘that we’re all as happy as sand-boys. We could stand this till Kingdom come.’ He asked: ‘We *aren’t* suffering any, are we?’

Notting said: no, not in particular. ‘C’ Company was grumbling that all its beautiful revetments had been knocked to pieces. The sentry near their own dugout complained that the pebbles in the gravel were nearly as bad as shrapnel.

‘Well, tell Brigade what I said. With Major Tietjens’ compliments, not mine. He’s in command.’

‘. . . You may as well make a cheerful impression to begin with,’ he added to Tietjens.

It was then that, suddenly, he burst out with:

‘Look here! Lend me two hundred and fifty quid!’

He remained staring fixedly at Tietjens with an odd air of a man who has just asked a teasing, jocular conundrum. . . .

Tietjens had recoiled—really half an inch. The man said he was suffering from a loathsome disease: it was being near something dirty. You don’t contract loathsome

diseases except from the cheapest kind of women or through being untidy-minded. . . . The man's pals had gone back on him. That sort of man's pals do go back on him! His accounts were all out. . . . He was in short the sort of swindling, unclean scoundrel to whom one lent money. . . . Irresistibly!

A crash of the sort you couldn't ignore, as is the case with certain claps in thunderstorms, sent a good deal of gravel down their cellar steps. It crashed against their shaky door. They heard Notting come out of his cellar and tell someone to shovel the beastly stuff back again where it had come from.

The Colonel looked up at the roof. He said that had knocked their parapet about a bit. Then he resumed his fixed gaze at Tietjens.

Tietjens said to himself.

'I'm losing my nerve. . . . It's the damned news that Campion is coming. . . . I'm becoming a wretched, irresolute Johnny.'

The Colonel said:

'I'm not a beastly sponger. I never borrowed before!' His chest heaved. . . . It really expanded and then got smaller again, the orifice in the khaki at his throat contracting. . . . Perhaps he had never borrowed before. . . .

After all, it didn't matter what kind of man this was, it was a question of what sort of a man Tietjens was becoming. He said:

'I can't lend you the money. I'll guarantee an overdraft to your agents. For two hundred and fifty.'

Well, then, he remained the sort of man who automatically lent money. He was glad.

The Colonel's face fell. His martially erect shoulders indeed collapsed. He exclaimed ruefully:

'Oh, I say, I thought you were the sort one could go to.'

Tietjens said:

'It's the same thing. You can draw a cheque on your bank exactly as if I paid the money in.'

The Colonel said:

'I *can*? It's the same thing? You're *sure*?' His questions were like the pleas of a young woman asking you not to murder her.

... He obviously was not a sponger. He was a financial virgin. There could not be a subaltern of eighteen in the whole army who did not know what it meant to have an overdraft guaranteed after a fortnight's leave. ... Tietjens only wished they didn't. He said:

'You've practically got the money in your hand as you sit there. I've only to write the letter. It's impossible your agents should refuse my guarantee. If they do, I'll raise the money and send it to you.'

He wondered why he didn't do that last in any case. A year or so ago he would have had no hesitation about over-drawing his account to any extent. Now he had an insupportable objection. Like a hatred!

He said:

'You'd better let me have your address,' he added, for his mind was really wandering a little. There was too much talk! 'I suppose you'll go to No. IX Red Cross at Rouen for a bit.'

The Colonel sprang to his feet:

'My God, what's that?' he cried out. 'Me ... to No. IX.'

Tietjens exclaimed:

'I don't know the procedure. You said you had. ...'

The other cried out:

'I've got cancer. A big swelling under the armpit.' He passed his hand over his bare flesh through the opening of his shirt, the long arm disappearing to the elbow. 'Good God ... I suppose when I said my pals had gone back on me you thought I'd asked them for help and been refused. I haven't. ... They're all killed. That's the worst way you can go back on a pal, isn't it? Don't you understand men's language?'

He sat down heavily on his bed again.

He said:

'By Jove: if you hadn't promised to let me have the

money there would have been nothing for me but to make a hole in the water.'

Tietjens said:

'Well, don't contemplate it now. Get yourself well looked after. What does Derry say?'

The Colonel again started violently:

'Derry! The M.O. . . . Do you think I'd tell him! Or little squits of subalterns? Or any man! You understand now why I wouldn't take Derry's beastly pill. How do I know what it mightn't do to. . . .'

Again he passed his hand under his armpit, his eyes taking on a yearning and calculating expression. He added:

'I thought it a duty to tell you as I was asking you for a loan. You might not get repaid. I suppose your offer still holds good?'

Drops of moisture had hitherto made beads on his forehead; it now shone, uniformly wet.

'If you haven't consulted anybody,' Tietjens said, 'you mayn't have got it. I should have yourself seen to right away. My offer still holds good!'

'Oh, I've got it, all right,' the Colonel answered with an air of infinite sapience. 'My old man—my governor—had it. Just like that. And he never told a soul till three days before his death. Neither shall I.'

'I should get it seen to,' Tietjens maintained. 'It's a duty to your children. And the King. You're too damn good a soldier for the Army to lose.'

'Nice of you to say so,' the Colonel said. 'But I've stood too much. I couldn't face waiting for the verdict.'

. . . It was no good saying he had faced worse things. He very likely hadn't, being the man he was.

The Colonel said:

'Now if I could be any good!'

Tietjens said:

'I suppose I may go along the trenches now. There's a wet place. . . .'

He was determined to go along the trenches. He had to . . . what was it . . . 'find a place to be alone with Heaven.'

He maintained also his conviction that he must show the men his mealsack of a body, mooning along; but attentive.

A problem worried him. He did not like putting it since it might seem to question the Colonel's military efficiency. He wrapped it up: had the Colonel any special advice as to keeping in touch with units on the right and left? And as to passing messages.

... That was a mania with Tietjens. If he had had his way he would keep the battalion day and night at communication drill. He had not been able to discover that any precautions of that sort were taken in that unit at all. Or in the others alongside. . . .

He had hit on the Colonel's heel of Achilles.

In the open it became evident: more and more and more and always more evident! The news that General Campion was taking over that command had changed Tietjens' whole view of the world.

The trenches were much as he had expected. They conformed indeed exactly to the image he had had in the cellar. They resembled heaps of reddish gravel laid out ready to distribute over the roads of parks. Getting out of the dug-out had been like climbing into a trolley that had just been inverted for the purposes of discharging its load. It was a nasty job for the men, cleaving a passage and keeping under cover. Naturally the German sharpshooters were on the lookout. Our problem was to get as much of the trench as you could set up by daylight. The German problem was to get as many of our men as possible. Tietjens would see that our men stayed under cover until nightfall; the commander of the unit opposite would attend to the sniping of as many men as he could. Tietjens himself had three first-class snipers left: they would attempt to get as many of the German snipers as they could. That was self-defence.

In addition a great many Enemy attentions would direct themselves to Tietjens' stretch of the line. The artillery would continue to plunk in a shell or so from time to time.

They would not do this very often because it would invite the attention of our artillery and that might prove too costly. More or less heavy masses of High Explosives would be thrown on to the line: what the Germans called *Minenwerfer* might project what our people called sausages. These being visible coming through the air you posted lookouts who gave you warning in time to get under cover. So the Germans had rather abandoned the use of these, probably as being costly in explosives and not so very effective. They made, that is to say, good holes but accounted for few men.

Airplanes with their beastly bullet-distributing hoppers—that is what they seemed like—would now and then duck along the trench, but not very often. The proceeding was, again, too costly: they would limit themselves as a rule to circling leisurely overhead and dropping things whilst the shrapnel burst round them—and spattered bullets over the trench. Flying pigs, aerial torpedoes, and other floating missiles, pretty, shining, silvery things with fins, would come through the air and would explode on striking the ground or after burying themselves. There was practically no end to their devices and the Huns had a new one every other week or so. They perhaps wasted themselves on new devices. A good many of them turned out to be duds. And a good many of their usually successful missiles turned out to be duds. They were undoubtedly beginning to feel the strain—mental and in their materials. So that if you had to be in these beastly places it was probably better to be in our trenches than theirs. Our war material was pretty good!

This was the war of attrition. . . . A mug's game! A mug's game as far as killing men was concerned, but not an uninteresting occupation if you considered it as a struggle of various minds spread all over the broad landscape in the sunlight. They did not kill many men and they expended an infinite number of missiles and a vast amount of thought. If you took six million men armed with loaded canes and stockings containing bricks or knives

and set them against another six million men similarly armed, at the end of three hours four million on the one side and the entire six million on the other would be dead. So, as far as killing went, it really was a mug's game. That was what happened if you let yourself get into the hands of the applied scientist. For all these things were the products not of the soldier but of hirsute, bespectacled creatures who peered through magnifying glasses. Or of course, on our side, they would be shaven-cheeked and less abstracted. They were efficient as slaughterers in that they enabled the millions of men to be moved. When you had only knives you could not move very fast. On the other hand, your knife killed at every stroke: you would set a million men firing at each other with rifles from eighteen hundred yards. But few rifles ever registered a hit. So the invention was relatively inefficient. And it dragged things out!

And suddenly it had become boring.

They were probably going to spend a whole day during which the Germans would strain themselves, their intelligences flickering across the world, to kill a couple of Tietjens' men, and Tietjens would exercise all his care in the effort not to have even one casualty. And at the end of the day they would all be very tired and the poor b——y men would have to set to work to repair the trenches in earnest. That was the ordinary day's work.

He was going about it. . . . He had got 'A' Company Commander to come up and talk to him about his fatigues. To the right of Headquarters the trenches appeared to have suffered less than to the left and it was possible to move quite a number of men without risk. 'A' Company Commander was an astonishingly thin, bald man of fifty. He was so bald that his tin hat slid about all over his skull. He had been a small shipowner and must have married very late in life, for he spoke of having two children, one of five, one of seven. A pigeon pair. His business was now making fifty thousand a year for him. It pleased Tietjens to think that his children would be well provided for if he

were killed. A nice, silent, capable man who usually looked into the distance rather abstractedly when he talked. He was killed two months later, cleanly, by a bullet.

He was impatient that things had not got a move on. What had become of the big Hun *strafe*?

Tietjens said:

'You remember the Hun company-sergeant-major that surrendered to your crowd the night before last? The fellow who said he was going to open a sweet-stuff shop in the Tottenham Court Road with the company money he had stolen? . . . Or perhaps you did not hear?'

The remembrance of that shifty-looking N.C.O. in blue-grey that was rather smart for a man coming in during a big fight stirred up intensely disagreeable feelings from the bottom of Tietjens' mind. It was detestable to him to be in control of the person of another human being—as detestable as it would have been to be himself a prisoner . . . that thing that he dreaded most in the world. It was indeed almost more detestable, since to be taken prisoner was at least a thing outside your own volition, whereas to control a prisoner, even under the compulsion of discipline on yourself, implies a certain free-will of your own. And this had been an especially loathsome affair. Even normally, though it was irrational enough, prisoners affected him with the sense that they were unclean. As if they were maggots. It was not sensible; but he knew that if he had had to touch a prisoner he would have felt nausea. It was no doubt the product of his passionate Tory sense of freedom. What distinguished man from the brutes was his freedom. When then a man was deprived of freedom he became like a brute. To exist in his society was to live with brutes: like Gulliver amongst the Houyhnhms!

And this unclean fellow had been a deserter in addition!

He had been brought into the H.Q. dugout at three in the morning after the *strafe* had completely died out. It appeared that he had come over, ostensibly in the ordinary course of the attack. But he had lain all night in a shell hole, creeping in to our lines only when things were quiet.

Previously to starting he had crammed his pockets with all the company money and even the papers that he could lay his hands on. He had been brought to H.Q. at that disagreeable hour because of the money and the papers, 'A' Company judging that such things ought to be put in the hands at least of the Adjutant as quickly as possible.

The C.O., McKechnie, the Intelligence Officer and the doctor had all, in addition to Tietjens himself, just settled in there, and the air of the smallish place was already fetid and reeking with service rum and whisky. The appearance of the German had caused Tietjens almost to vomit, and he was already in a state of enervation from having had to bring the battalion in. His temples were racked with a sort of neuralgia that he believed to be caused by eyestrain.

Normally, the questioning of prisoners before they reached Division was strongly discountenanced, but a deserter excites more interest than an ordinary prisoner, and the C.O. who was by then in a state of hilarious mutiny absolutely ordered Tietjens to get all he could out of the prisoner. Tietjens knew a little German: the Intelligence Officer who knew that language well had been killed. Dunne, replacing him, had no German.

The shifty, upright, thin, dark fellow with even unusually uneasy eyes, had answered questions readily enough. Yes, the Huns were fed up with the war; discipline had become so difficult to maintain that one of his reasons for deserting had been sheer weariness over the effort to keep the men under him in order. They had no food. It was impossible to get the men, in an advance, past any kind of food dumps. He was continually being unjustly reprimanded for his want of success, and standing there he cursed his late officers! Nevertheless, when the C.O. made Tietjens ask him some questions about an Austrian gun that the Germans had lately introduced to that front and that threw a self-burying shell containing an incredible quantity of H.E., the fellow had clicked his heels together and had answered:

'*Nein, Herr Offizier, das wäre Landesverratung!*' . . . to answer that would be to betray one's country. His psychology had been difficult to grasp. He had explained as well as he could, using a few words of English, the papers that he had brought over. They were mostly exhortations to the German soldiers, circulars containing news of disasters to and the demoralization of the Allied troops; there were also a few returns of no great interest—mostly statistics of influenza cases. But when Tietjens had held before the fellow's eyes a typewritten page with a heading that he had now forgotten, the Sergeant had exclaimed: '*Ach, nicht das!*' . . . and had made as if to snatch the paper from Tietjens' fingers. Then he had desisted, realizing that he was risking his life, no doubt. But he had become as pale as death, and had refused to translate the phrases that Tietjens did not understand; and indeed Tietjens understood practically none of the words, which were all technical.

He knew the paper contained some sort of movement orders; but he was by that time heartily sick of the affair and he knew that that was just the sort of paper that the staff did not wish men in the line to meddle with. So he dropped the matter, and the Colonel and the Pals being by that time tired of listening and not grasping what was happening, Tietjens had sent the fellow at the double back to Brigade under the charge of the Intelligence Officer and a heavier escort than was usual.

What remained to Tietjens of the affair was the expression that the fellow had used when asked what he was going to do with the Company money he had stolen. He was going to open a little sweet shop in the Tottenham Court Road. He had, of course, been a waiter: in Old Compton Street. Tietjens wondered vaguely what would become of him. What did they do with deserters? Perhaps they interned them: perhaps they made them N.C.O.'s in prisoners' units. He could never go back to Germany. . . . That remained to him—and the horror and loathing he had felt at the episode: as if it had caused him personal deterioration. He had put the matter out of his mind.

It occurred to him now that, very likely, the urgent announcements from Staff of all sorts had been inspired by that very paper! The paper that loathsome fellow had tried to grab at. He remembered that he had been feeling so sick that he hadn't bothered to have the man handcuffed. . . . It raised a number of questions. Does a man desert and at the same time refuse to betray his country? Well, he might. There was no end to the contradictions in men's characters. Look at the C.O. An efficient officer and a muddled ass in one: even in soldiering matters!

On the other hand, the whole thing might be a plant of the Huns. The paper—the movement order—might have been meant to reach our Army Headquarters. On the face of it, important movement orders do not lie about in Company offices. Not usually. The Huns might be trying to call our attention to this part of the line whilst their real attack might be coming somewhere else. That again was unlikely because that particular part of the line was so weak owing to poor General Puffles' unpopularity with the great ones at home that the Huns would be mad if they attacked anywhere else. And the French were hurrying up straight to that spot in terrific force. He might then be a hero! . . . But he didn't look like a hero!

This sort of complication was wearisome nowadays, though once it would have delighted him to dwell on it and work it out with nice figures and calculations of stresses. Now his only emotion about the matter was that, thank God, it was none of his job. The Huns didn't appear to be coming.

He found himself regretting that the *strafe* was not coming after all. That was incredible. How could he regret not being put into immediate danger of death?

Long, thin, scrawny and mournful, with his tin hat now tilted forward over his nose, the O.C. 'A' Company gazed into futurity and remarked:

'I'm sorry the Huns aren't coming!'

He was sorry the Huns were not coming. Because if they came they might as well come according to the information

supplied by that prisoner. He had captured that fellow. He might as well therefore get the credit. It might get him remembered if he put in for leave. He wanted leave. He wanted to see his children. He had not seen them for two years now. Children of five and seven change a good deal in two years. He grumbled on. Without any shame at the revelation of his intimate motives. The quite ordinary man! But he was perfectly to be respected. He had a rather grating chest voice. It occurred to Tietjens that that man would never see his children.

He wished these intimations would not come to him. He found himself at times looking at the faces of several men and thinking that this or that man would shortly be killed. He wished he could get rid of the habit. It seemed indecent. As a rule he was right. But then, almost every man you looked at there was certain to get killed. . . . Himself excepted. He himself was going to be wounded in the soft place behind the right collar-bone.

He regretted that the *strafe* was not coming that morning! Because if they came they might as well come according to the information supplied by the prisoner he had examined in the stinking dug-out. His unit had captured the fellow. He would now be signing its H.Q. chits as Acting O.C. Ninth Glamorganshires. So he, Tietjens, had captured that fellow. And his perspicacity in having him sent immediately back to Brigade with his precious paper might get him, Tietjens, remembered favourably at Brigade H.Q. Then they would leave him in temporary command of his battalion. And if they did that he might do well enough to get a battalion of his own!

He astounded himself. . . . His mentality was that of O.C. 'A' Company!

He said:

'It was damn smart of you to see that fellow was of importance and have him sent at the double to me.' O.C. 'A' Coy. grew red over all his grim face. So, one day, he, Tietjens, might flush with pleasure at the words of some squit with a red band round his hat!

He said:

'Even if the Germans don't come it might have been helpful. It might have been even more helpful. It might have been the means of keeping them back.' Because of course if the Germans knew that we had got hold of their Movement Order they might change their plans. That would inconvenience them. It was not likely. There was perhaps not time for the news that we knew to have got through to their Important Ones. But it was possible. Such things had happened.

Aranjuez and the Lance-Corporal stood still and so silent in the sunlight that they resembled fragments of the reddish trench. The red gravel of the trenches began here, however, to be smirched with more agricultural marl. Later the trenches became pure alluvial soil and then ran down more smartly into stuff so wet that it was like a quicksand. A bog. It was there he had tried revetting with a syphon-drain. The thought of that extreme of his line reminded him. He said:

'You know all about keeping in communication with immediately neighbouring units?'

The grim fellow said:

'Only what they taught in the training camps at the beginning of the war, sir. When I joined up. It was fairly thorough but it's all forgotten now.'

Tietjens said to Aranjuez:

'You're Signalling Officer. What do you know about keeping in communication with units on your right and left?'

Aranjuez, blushing and stammering, knew all about buzzers and signals. Tietjens said:

'That's only for trenches, all that. But, in motion. At your O.T.C. Didn't they practise you in keeping communication between troops in motion?'

They hadn't at the O.T.C. . . . At first it had been in the programme. But it had always been crowded out by some stunt. Rifle-grenade drill. Bomb-throwing. Stokes-gun drill. Any sort of machine drill as long as it was not mov-

ing bodies of men over difficult country—sandhills, say—and hammering into them that they must keep in touch unit with unit or drop connecting files if a unit itself divided up.

It was perhaps the dominant idea of Tietjens, perhaps the main idea that he got out of warfare—that at all costs you must keep in touch with your neighbouring troops. When, later, he had to command the escorts over immense bodies of German prisoners on the march it several times occurred to him to drop so many connecting files for the benefit of the men or N.C.O.s—or even the officers, of his escort who had fallen out through sheer fatigue or disease, that he would arrive in a new camp at the day's end with hardly any escort left at all—say thirty for three thousand prisoners. The business of an escort being to prevent the escape of prisoners it might have been thought better to retain the connecting files for that purpose. But, on the other hand, he never lost a prisoner except by German bombs, and he never lost any of his stragglers at all.

... He said to O.C. 'A' Company:

'Please look after this matter in your Company. I shall arrange as soon as I can to transfer you to the outside right of the unit. If the men are doing nothing lecture them, please, yourself on this subject and talk very seriously to all lance-corporals, section leaders and oldest privates of platoons. And be good enough to get into communication at once with the Company Commander of the Wiltshires immediately on our right. In one of two ways the war is over. The war of trenches. Either the Germans will immediately drive us into the North Sea or we shall drive them back. They will then be in a state of demoralization and we shall need to move fast. Lieutenant Aranjuez, you will arrange to be present when Captain Gibbs talks to his Company and you will repeat what he says in the other Companies.'

He was talking quickly and distinctly, as he did when he was well, and he was talking stiltedly on purpose. He could not obviously call an officers' conference with a German

attack possibly impending; but he was pretty certain that something of what he said would penetrate to nearly every ear of the Battalion if he said it before a Company Commander, a Signalling Lieutenant and an Orderly-room Lance-Corporal. It would go through that the Old Man was dotty on this joke, and Sergeants would see that some attention was paid to the matter. So would the officers. It was all that could be done at the moment.

He walked behind Gibbs along the trench which at this point was perfectly intact and satisfactory, the red gravel giving place to marl. He remarked to the good fellow that in that way they would do something to checkmate the blasted civilians whose meddling with the processes of war had put them where they were. Gibbs agreed gloomily that civilian interference had lost the war. They so hated the regular army that whenever a civilian saw a trace of regular training remaining in this mud-fighting that they liked us to indulge in, he wrote a hundred letters under different names to the papers, and the War Secretary at once took steps to retain that hundred votes; Gibbs had been reading a home newspaper that morning.

Tietjens surprised himself by saying:

'Oh, we'll beat them yet!' It was an expression of impracticable optimism. He sought to justify his words by saying that their Army Commanders having put up such a damn good fight in spite of the most criminal form of civilian interference had begun to put a stopper on their games. Champion's coming was a proof that soldiers were going to be allowed to have some say in the conduct of the war. It meant the single command. . . . Gibbs expressed a muted satisfaction. If the French took over those lines as they certainly would if they had the Single Command he would no doubt be able to go home and see his children. All their divisions would have to be taken out of the lines to be reorganized and brought up to strength.

Tietjens said:

'As to what we were talking about. . . . Supposing you detailed outside section leaders and another file to keep in

touch with the Wiltshires and they did the same. Supposing that for purpose of recognition they wore handkerchiefs round their right and left arms respectively. . . . It has been done. . . .'

'The Huns,' Captain Gibbs said grimly, 'would probably pick them off specially. They'd probably pick off specially any one who had any sort of badge. So you would be worse off.'

They were going at his request to look at a section of his trench. Orderly Room had ordered him to make arrangements for machine-gun performances there. He couldn't. It didn't exist. Nothing existed. He supposed that to have been the new Austrian gun. New probably, but why Austrian? The Austrians did not usually interest themselves much in High Explosives. This one, whatever it was, threw something that buried itself and then blew up half the universe. With astonishingly little noise and commotion. Just lifted up. Like a hippopotamus. He, Gibbs, had hardly noticed anything as you would have if it had been say a mine. When they came and told him that a mine had gone off there he would not believe them. . . . But you could see for yourself that it looked exactly as if a mine had been chucking things about. A small mine. But still a mine. . . .

In the shelter of the broken end of the trench a fatigue of six men worked with pick and shovel, patiently, two at a time. They threw up mud and stones and patted them and, stepping down into the thus created vacancy, threw up more mud and stones. Water oozed about, uncertain where to go. There must be a spring there. That hillside was honeycombed with springs. . . .

You would certainly have said there had been a mine there. If we had been advancing it would have been a small mine left by the Huns to cheer us up. But we had retreated on to ground we had always held. So it couldn't have been a mine.

Also it kicked the ground forward and backward and relatively little laterally, so that the deep hole it had created more resembled the entry into a rudimentary shaft

than the usually circular shell hole. A mound existed between Tietjens and 'B' Company trench, considerably higher than you could see over. A vast mound; a miniature Primrose Hill. But much bigger than anything they had seen created by flying pigs or other aerial missiles as yet. Anyhow the mound was high enough to give Tietjens a chance to get round it in cover and shuffle down into 'B' Company's line. He said to Gibbs:

'We shall have to see about that machine gun place. Don't come any further with me. Make those fellows keep their heads down and send them back if the Huns seem like sending over any more dirt.'

VI

Tietjens reclined on the reverse slope of the considerable mound. In the sunlight. He had to be alone. To reflect on his sentimental situation and his machine guns. He had been kept so out of the affairs of the unit that he had suddenly remembered that he knew nothing whatever about his machine guns, or even about the fellow who had to look after him. A new fellow called Cobbe, who looked rather vacant, with an immense sunburnt nose and an open mouth. Not, on the face of him, alert enough for his job. But you never knew.

He was hungry. He had eaten practically nothing since seven the night before, and had been on his feet the greater part of the time.

He sent Lance-Corporal Duckett to 'A' Company dug-out, to ask if they could favour him with a sandwich and some coffee with rum in it: he sent Second-Lieutenant Aranjuez to 'B' Company to tell them that he was coming to take a look round on their men and quarters. 'B' Company Commander for the moment was a very young boy just out from an O.T.C. It was annoying that he had an outside Company. But Constantine, the former Commander, had been killed the night before last. He was, in

fact, said to be the gentleman whose remains hung in the barbed wire which was what made Tietjens doubtful whether it could be he. He should not have been so far to the left if he had been bringing his Company in. Anyhow, there had been no one to replace him but this boy—Bennett. A good boy. So shy that he could hardly give a word of command on parade, but yet with all his wits about him. And blessed with an uncommonly experienced Company Sergeant-Major. One of the original old Glamorganshires. Well, beggars could not be choosers! The Company had reported that morning five cases of the influenza that was said to be ravaging the outside world. Here then was another thing for which they had to thank the outside world—this band of rag-time solitaires! They let the outside world severely alone; they were, truly, hermits. Then the outside world did this to them. Why not leave them to their monastic engrossedness?

Even the rotten and detestable Huns had it! They were said by the Divisional news-sheets to have it so badly that whole Divisions were incapable of effective action. That might be a lie, invented for the purpose of heartening us; but it was probably true. The German men were apparently beastly underfed, and, at that, only on substitute-foods of relatively small percentage of nutritive value. The papers brought over by that N.C.O. had certainly spoken urgently of the necessity of taking every precaution against the spread of this flail. Another circular violently and lachrymously assured the troops that they were as well fed as the civilian populations and the Corps of Officers. Apparently there had been some sort of scandal. A circular of which he had not had time to read the whole ended up with an assertion something like: 'Thus the honour of the Corps of Officers has been triumphantly vindicated.'

It was a ghastly thought, that of that whole vast territory that confronted them, filled with millions of half-empty stomachs that bred disorders in the miserable brains. Those fellows must be the most miserable human beings that had

ever existed. God knows, the life of our own Tommies must be Hell. But those fellows. . . . It would not bear thinking of.

And it was curious to consider how the hatred that one felt for the inhabitants of those regions seemed to skip in a wide trajectory over the embattled ground. It was the civilian populations and their rulers that one hated with real hatred. Now the swine were starving the poor devils in the trenches!

They were detestable. The German fighters and their Intelligence and staffs were merely boring and grotesque. Unending nuisances. For he was confoundedly irritated to think of the mess they had made of his nice clean trenches. It was like when you go out for an hour and leave your dog in the drawing-room. You come back and find that it has torn to pieces all your sofa-cushions. You would like to knock its head off. . . . So you would like to knock the German soldiers' heads off. But you did not wish them much real harm. Nothing like having to live in that hell on perpetually half empty, windy stomachs with the nightmares they set up! Naturally influenza was decimating them.

Anyhow, Germans were the sort of people that influenza *would* bowl over. They were bores because they came for ever true to type. You read their confounded circulars and they made you grin whilst a little puking. They were like continual caricatures of themselves and they were continually hysterical. . . . Hypochondriacal. . . . Corps of Officers. . . . Proud German Army. . . . His Glorious Majesty. . . . Mighty Deeds. . . . Not much of the Rag-time Army about that, and that was welling out continuously all the time. . . . Hypochondria!

A rag-time army was not likely to have influenza so badly. It felt neither its moral nor its physical pulse. . . . Still, here was influenza in 'B' Company. They must have got it from the Huns the night before last. 'B' Company had had them jump in on top of them; then and there had been hand-to-hand fighting. It was a nuisance. 'B' Company was a nuisance. It had naturally been stuck into the

dampest and lowest part of their line. Their company dug-out was reported to be like a well with a dripping roof. It would take 'B' Company to be afflicted with such quarters. . . . It was difficult to see what to do—not to drain their quarters. . . . but to exorcise their ill-luck. Still, it would have to be done. He was going into their quarters to make a *strafe*, but he sent Aranjuez to announce his coming so as to give the decent young Company Commander a chance to redd up his house. . . .

The beastly Huns! They stood between him and Valentine Wannop. If they would go home he could be sitting talking to her for whole afternoons. That was what a young woman was for. You seduced a young woman in order to be able to finish your talks with her. You could not do that without living with her. You could not live with her without seducing her; but that was the by-product. The point is that you can't otherwise talk. You can't finish talks at street corners; in museums; even in drawing-rooms. You mayn't be in the mood when she is in the mood—for the intimate conversation that means the final communion of your souls. You have to wait together—for a week, for a year, for a lifetime, before the final intimate conversation may be attained . . . and exhausted. So that. . . .

That in effect was love. It struck him as astonishing. The word was so little in his vocabulary. . . . Love, ambition, the desire for wealth. They were things he had never known of as existing—as capable of existing within him. He had been the Younger Son, loafing, contemptuous, capable, idly contemplating life, but ready to take up the position of the Head of the Family if Death so arranged matters. He had been a sort of eternal Second-in-Command.

Now: what the Hell was he? A sort of Hamlet of the Trenches? No, by God he was not. . . . He was perfectly ready for action. Ready to command a battalion. He was presumably a lover. They did things like commanding battalions. And worse!

He ought to write her a letter. What in the world would she think of this gentleman who had once made improper

proposals to her; balked; said 'So long!' or perhaps not even 'So long!' And then walked off. With never a letter! Not even a picture postcard! For two years! A sort of a Hamlet all right! Or a swine!

Well, then, he ought to write her a letter. He ought to say: 'This is to tell you that I propose to live with you as soon as this show is over. You will be prepared immediately on cessation of active hostilities to put yourself at my disposal. Please. Signed, Xtopher Tietjens, Acting O.C. 9th Glams.' A proper military communication. She would be pleased to see that he was commanding a battalion. Or perhaps she would not be pleased. She was a Pro-German. She loved these tiresome fellows who tore his, Tietjens', sofa-cushions to pieces.

That was not fair. She was a Pacifist. She thought these proceedings pestilential and purposeless. Well, there were times when they appeared purposeless enough. Look at what had happened to his neat gravel walks. And to the marl too. Though that served the purpose of letting him sit sheltered. In the sunlight. With any number of larks. Someone once wrote:

'A myriad larks in unison sang o'er her, soaring out
of sight!'

That was imbecile really. Larks cannot sing in unison. They make a heartless noise like that produced by the rubbing of two corks one on the other. . . . There came into his mind an image. Years ago: years and years ago: probably after having watched that gunner torment the fat Hun, because it had been below Max Redoubt. . . . The sun was now for certain shining on Bemerton! Well, he could never be a country parson. He was going to live with Valentine Wannop! . . . he had been coming down the reverse side of the range, feeling good. Probably because he had got out of that O.P. which the Germans guns had been trying to find. He went down with long strides, the tops of thistles brushing his hips. Obviously the thistles contained things that attracted flies. They are apt to after

a famous victory. So myriads of swallows pursued him, swirling round and round him, their wings touching; for a matter of twenty yards all round and their wings brushing him and the tops of the thistles. And as the blue sky was reflected in the blue of their backs—for their backs were below his eyes—he had felt like a Greek God striding through the sea. . . .

The larks were less inspiring. Really, they were abusing the German guns. Imbecilely and continuously, they were screaming imprecations and threats. They had been relatively sparse until just now. Now that the shells were coming back from a mile or so off the sky was thick with larks. A myriad—two myriad—corks at once. Not in unison. Sang o'er him, soaring out of sight! . . . You might almost say that it was a sign that the Germans were going to shell you again. Wonderful 'hinstinck' set by the Almighty in their little bosoms! It was perhaps also accurate. No doubt the shells as they approached more and more shook the earth and disturbed the little bosoms on their nests. So they got up and shouted; perhaps warning each other; perhaps mere defiance of the artillery.

He was going to write to Valentine Wannop. It was a clumsy swine's trick not to have written to her before. He had proposed to seduce her; hadn't done it and had gone off without a word. . . . Considering himself rather a swell, too!

He said:

'Did you get a bit to eat, Corporal!'

The Corporal balanced himself before Tietjens on the slope of the mound. He blushed, rubbing his right sole on his left instep, holding in his right hand a small tin can and a cup, in his left an immaculate towel containing a small cube.

Tietjens debated whether he should first drink of the coffee and army rum to increase his zest for the sandwiches, or whether he should first eat the sandwiches and so acquire more thirst for the coffee. . . . It would be reprehensible to write to Valentine Wannop. The act of the

cold-blooded seducer. Reprehensible!... It depended on what was in the sandwiches. It would be agreeable to fill the void below and inwards from his breastbone. But whether do it first with a solid or warm moisture?

The Lance-Corporal was deft. . . . He set the coffee tin, cup and towel on a flat stone that stuck out of that heap; the towel, unfolded, served as a tablecloth; there appeared three heaps of ethereal sandwiches. He said he had eaten half a tin of warm mutton and haricot beans, whilst he was cutting the sandwiches. The meat in the sandwiches consisted of *foie gras*, that pile: bully beef reduced to a paste with butter that was margarine, anchovy paste out of a tin and minced onion out of pickles; the third pile was bully beef *nature*, seasoned with Worcester sauce. . . . All the materials he had at disposal!

Tietjens smiled on the boy at his work. He said this must be a regular *chef*. The boy said:

'Not a *chef*, yet, sir!' He had a camp stool hung on his trenching tool behind his hip. He had been chief assistant to one of the chief cooks in the Savoy. He had been going to go to Paris. 'What you call a marmiton, sir!' he said. With his trenching tool he was scooping out a level place in front of the flat rock. He set the camp stool on the flattened platform.

Tietjens said:

'You used to wear a white cap and white overalls?'

He liked to think of the blond boy resembling Valentine Wannop dressed all in slim white. The Lance-Corporal said:

'It's different now, sir!' He stood at Tietjens' side, always caressing his instep. He regarded cooking as an Art. He would have preferred to be a painter, but Mother hadn't enough money. The source of supply dried up during the War. . . . If the C.O. would say a word for him after the War. . . . He understood it was going to be difficult to get jobs after the War. All the blighters who had got out of serving, all the R.A.S.C., all the Lines of Communication men would get first chance. As the saying was, the

further from the Line the better the pay. And the chance, too!

Tietjens said:

'Certainly I shall recommend you. You'll get a job all right. I shall never forget your sandwiches.' He would never forget the keen, clean flavour of the sandwiches or the warm generosity of the sweet, be-rummed coffee! In the blue air of that April hill-side. All the objects on that white towel were defined: with iridescent edges. The boy's face, too! Perhaps not physically iridescent. His breath, too, was very easy. Pure air! He was going to write to Valentine Wannop: 'Hold yourself at my disposal. Please. Signed. . . .' Reprehensible! Worse than reprehensible! You do not seduce the child of your father's oldest friend. He said:

'I shall find it difficult enough to get a job after the War!'

Not only to seduce the young woman, but to invite her to live a remarkably precarious life with him. It isn't done!

The Lance-Corporal said:

'Oh, sir; no, sir! . . . You're Mr Tietjens, of Groby!'

He had often been to Groby of a Sunday afternoon. His mother was a Middlesbrough woman. Southbank, rather. He had been to the Grammar School and was going to Durham University when . . . Supplies stopped. On the eight nine fourteen. . . .

They oughtn't to put North Riding, Yorkshire, boys in Welsh-traditioned units. It was wrong. But for that he would not have run against this boy of disagreeable reminiscences.

'They say,' the boy said, 'that the well at Groby is three hundred and twenty feet deep, and the cedar at the corner of the house a hundred and sixty. The depth of the well twice the height of the tree!' He had often dropped stones down the well and listened: they made an astonishingly loud noise. Long: like echoes gone mad! His mother knew the cook at Groby. Mrs Harmsworth. He had often seen . . . he rubbed his ankles more furiously, in a paroxysm . . . Mr Tietjens, the father, and him, and Mr Mark and Mr

John and Miss Eleanor. He once handed Miss Eleanor her riding crop when she dropped it. . . .

Tietjens was never going to live at Groby. No more feudal atmosphere! He was going to live, he figured, in a four-room attic-flat, on the top of one of the Inns of Court. With Valentine Wannop. *Because* of Valentine Wannop!

He said to the boy:

'Those German shells seem to be coming back. Go and request Captain Gibbs as soon as they get near to take his fatigues under cover until they have passed.'

He wanted to be alone with Heaven. . . . He drank his last cup of warm, sweetened coffee, laced with rum. . . . He drew a deep breath. Fancy drawing a deep breath of satisfaction after a deep draught of warm coffee, sweetened with condensed milk and laced with rum! . . . Reprehensible! Gastronomically reprehensible! . . . What would they say at the Club? . . . Well, he was never going to be at the Club! The Club claret was to be regretted! Admirable claret! And the cold sideboard!

But, for the matter of that, fancy drawing deep breaths of satisfaction over the mere fact of lying—in command of a battalion!—on a slope, in the clear air, with twenty thousand—two myriad!—corks making noises overhead and the German guns directing their projectiles so that they were slowly approaching! Fancy!

They were, presumably, trying out their new Austrian gun. Methodically, with an infinite thoroughness. If, that is to say, there really was a new Austrian gun. Perhaps there wasn't. Division had been in a great state of excitement over such a weapon. It stood in Orders that every one was to try to obtain every kind of information about it, and it was said to throw a projectile of a remarkable, High Explosive efficiency. So Gibbs had jumped to the conclusion that the thing that had knocked to pieces his projected machine-gun emplacement, had been the new gun. In that case they were trying it out very thoroughly.

The actual report of the gun or guns—they fired every three minutes, so that might mean that there was only one

and that it took about three minutes to re-load—was very loud and rather high in tone. He had not yet heard the actual noise made by the projectile, but the reports from a distance had been singularly dulled. When, presumably, the projectile had effected its landing, it bored extraordinarily into the ground and then exploded with a time-fuse. Very likely it would not be very dangerous to life, but, if they had enough of the guns and the H.E. to plaster the things all along the Line, and if the projectiles worked as efficiently as they had done on poor Gibbs' trench, there would be an end of trench warfare on the Allied side. But, of course, they probably had not either enough guns or enough High Explosive and the thing would very likely act less efficiently in other sorts of soils. They were very likely trying that out. Or, if they were firing with only one gun they might be trying how many rounds could be fired before the gun became ineffective. Or they might be trying only the attrition game: smashing up the trenches which was always useful and then sniping the men who tried to repair them. You could bag a few men in that way, now and then. Or, naturally, with planes. . . . There was no end to these tiresome alternatives! Presumably, again, our planes might spot that gun or battery. Then it would stop!

Reprehensible! . . . He snorted! If you don't obey the rules of your club you get hoofed out, and that's that! If you retire from the post of Second-in-Command of Groby, you don't have to . . . oh, attend battalion parades! He had refused to take any money from Brother Mark on the ground of a fantastic quarrel. But he had not any quarrel with Brother Mark. The sardonic pair of them were just matching obstinacies. On the other hand you had to set to the tenantry an example of chastity, sobriety, probity, or you could not take their beastly money. You provided them with the best Canadian seed corn; with agricultural experiments suited to their soils; you sat on the head of your agent; you kept their buildings in repair; you apprenticed their sons; you looked after their daughters when they got

into trouble and after their bastards, your own or another man's. But you must reside on the estate. *You must reside on the estate.* The money that comes out of those poor devils' pockets must go back into the land so that the estate and all on it, down to the licensed beggars, may grow richer and richer and richer. So he had invented his fantastic quarrel with Brother Mark: because he was going to take Valentine to live with him. You could not have a Valentine Wannop having with you in a Groby the infinite and necessary communings. You could have a painted doxy for the servants' hall, quarrelling with the other maids, who would want her job, and scandalizing the parsons for miles round. In their sardonic way the tenants appreciated that: it was in the tradition and all over the Riding they did it themselves. But not a lady: the daughter of your father's best friend! They wanted Quality women to *be* Quality and they themselves would go to ruin, spend their dung-and-seed-money on whores and wreck the fortunes of the Estate, sooner than that you should indulge in infinite conversations. . . . So he hadn't taken a penny of their money from his brother, and he wouldn't take a penny when he in turn became Groby. Fortunately, there was the heir. . . . Otherwise he could not have gone with that girl!

Two pangs went through him. His son had never written to him: the girl might have married a War Office clerk! On the rebound! That was what it would be: a civilian War Office clerk would be the most exact contrast to himself! . . . But the son's letters would have been stopped by the mother. That was what they did to people who were where *he* was. As the C.O. had said! And Valentine Wannop, who had listened to his conversation, would never want to mingle intimately in another's! Their communion was immutable and not to be shaken!

So he was going to write to her: freckled, downright, standing square on feet rather widely planted apart, just ready to say: 'Oh, *chuck* it, Edith Ethel!' . . . She made the sunlight!

Or no: by Heavens, he could not write to her! If he stopped one or went dotty. . . . Wouldn't it make it infinitely worse for her to know that his love for her had been profound and immutable? It would make it far worse, for by now the edges of passion had probably worn less painful. Or there was the chance of it! . . . But impenitently he would go on willing her to submit to his will: through mounds thrown up by Austrian projectiles and across the seas. They would do what they wanted and take what they got for it!

He reclined, on his right shoulder, feeling like some immense and absurd statue: a collection of meal-sacks done in mud: with grotesque shorts revealing his muddy knees. . . . The figure on one of Michelangelo's Medici tombs. Or perhaps his *Adam* . . . He felt the earth move a little beneath him. The last projectile must have been pretty near. He would not have noticed the sound, it had become such a regular sequence. But he noticed the quiver in the earth. . . .

Reprehensible! He said. For God's sake let us be reprehensible! And have done with it! We aren't Hun strategists for ever balancing pros and cons of militant morality!

He took with his left hand the cup from the rock. Little Aranjuez came round the mound. Tietjens threw the cup downhill at a large bit of rock. He said to Aranjuez's wistful enquiring eyes:

'So that no toast more ignoble may ever be drunk out of it!'

The boy gasped and blushed:

'Then you've got some one that you love, sir!' he said in his tone of hero-worship. 'Is she like Nancy, in Bailleul?'

Tietjens said:

'No, not like Nancy. . . . Or, perhaps, yes, a little like Nancy!' He did not want to hurt the boy's feelings by the suggestion that any one unlike Nancy could be loved. He felt a premonition that that child was going to be hurt. Or, perhaps, it was only that he was already so suffering.

The boy said:

'Then you'll get her, sir. You'll certainly get her!'

'Yes, I shall probably get her!' Tietjens said.

The Lance-Corporal came, too, round the mound. He said that 'A' Company were all under cover. They went all together round the heap in the direction of 'B' Company's trench down into which they slid. It descended sharply. It was certainly wet. It ended practically in a little swamp. The next battalion had even some yards of sand-bag parapet before entering the slope again with its trench. This was Flanders. Duck country. The bit of swamp would make personal keeping in communication difficult. Where Tietjens had put in his tile-syphons a great deal of water had exuded. The young O.C. Company said that they had had to bale the trench out, until they had made a little drain down into the bog. They baled out with shovels. Two of the shovels still stood against the brushwood revetments of the parapet.

'Well, you should not leave your shovels about!' Tietjens shouted. He was feeling considerable satisfaction at the working of his syphon. In the meantime we had begun a considerable artillery demonstration. It became overwhelming. There was some sort of Bloody Mary somewhere a few yards off, or so it seemed. She pooped off. The planes had perhaps reported the position of the Austrian gun. Or we might be *strafing* their trenches to make them shut up that weapon. It was like being a dwarf at a conversation, a conflict—of mastodons. There was so much noise it seemed to grow dark. It was a mental darkness. You could not think. A Dark Age! The earth moved.

He was looking at Aranjuez from a considerable height. He was enjoying a considerable view. Aranjuez's face had a rapt expression—like that of a man composing poetry. Long dollops of liquid mud surrounded them in the air. Like black pancakes being tossed. He thought: 'Thank God I did not write to her. We are being blown up!' The earth turned like a weary hippopotamus. It settled down slowly over the face of Lance-Corporal Duckett who lay on his side, and went on in a slow wave.

It was slow, slow, slow...like a slowed down movie. The earth manoeuvred for an infinite time. He remained suspended in space. As if he were suspended as he had wanted to be in front of that cockscomb in whitewash. Coincidence!

The earth sucked slowly and composedly at his feet.

It assimilated his calves, his thighs. It imprisoned him above the waist. His arms being free, he resembled a man in a life-buoy. The earth moved him slowly. It was solidish.

Below him, down a mound, the face of little Aranjuez, brown, with immense black eyes in bluish whites, looked at him. Out of viscous mud. A head on a charger! He could see the imploring lips form the words: 'Save me, Captain!' He said: 'I've got to save myself first!' He could not hear his own words. The noise was incredible.

A man stood over him. He appeared immensely tall because Tietjens' face was on a level with his belt. But he was a small Cockney Tommy really. Name of Cockshott. He pulled at Tietjens' two arms. Tietjens tried to kick with his feet. Then he realized it was better not to kick with his feet. He was pulled out. Satisfactorily. There had been two men at it. A second, a Corporal had come. They were all three of them grinning. He slid down with the sliding earth towards Aranjuez. He smiled at the pallid face. He slipped a lot. He felt a frightful burning on his neck, below and behind the ear. His hand came down from feeling the place. The finger tips had no end of mud and a little pinkishness on them. A pimple had perhaps burst. He had at least two men not killed. He signed agitatedly to the Tommies. He made gestures of digging. They were to get shovels.

He stood over Aranjuez, on the edge of liquid mud. Perhaps he would sink in. He did not sink in. Not above his boot tops. He felt his feet to be enormous and sustaining. He knew what had happened, Aranjuez was sunk in the issuing hole of the spring that made that bog. It was like being on Exmoor. He bent down over an ineffable, small

face. He bent lower and his hands entered the slime. He had to get on his hand and knees.

Fury entered his mind. He had been sniped at. Before he had had that pain he had heard, he realized, an intimate drone under the hellish tumult. There was reason for furious haste. Or, no . . . They were low. In a wide hole. There was no reason for furious haste. Especially on your hands and knees.

His hands were under the slime, and his forearms. He battled his hands down greasy cloth; under greasy cloth. *Slimy*, not greasy! He pushed outwards. The boy's hands and arms appeared. It was going to be easier. His face was now quite close to the boy's, but it was impossible to hear what he said. Possibly he was unconscious. Tietjens said: 'Thank God for my enormous physical strength!' It was the first time that he had ever had to be thankful for great physical strength. He lifted the boy's arms over his own shoulders so that his hand might clasp themselves behind his neck. They were slimy and disagreeable. He was short in the wind. He heaved back. The boy came up a little. He was certainly fainting. He gave no assistance. The slime was filthy. It was condemnation of a civilization that he, Tietjens, possessed of enormous physical strength, should never have needed to use it before. He looked like a collection of meal-sacks; but, at least, he could tear a pack of cards in half. If only his lungs weren't . . .

Cockshott, the Tommie, and the Corporal were beside him. Grinning. With the two shovels that ought not to have stood against the parapet of their trench. He was intensely irritated. He had tried to indicate with his signs that it was Lance-Corporal Duckett that they were to dig out. It was probably no longer Lance-Corporal Duckett. It was probably by now 'it.' The body! He had probably lost a man, after all!

Cockshott and the Corporal pulled Aranjuez out of the slime. He came out reluctantly, like a lugworm out of sand. He could not stand. His legs gave way. He drooped like a flower done in slime. His lips moved, but you could not

hear him. Tietjens took him from the two men who supported him between the arms and laid him a little way up the mound. He shouted in the ear of the Corporal: 'Duckett! Go and dig out Duckett! At the double!'

He knelt and felt along the boy's back. His spine might have been damaged. The boy did not wince. His spine might be damaged all the same. He could not be left there. Bearers could be sent with a stretcher if one was to be found. But they might be sniped coming. Probably, he, Tietjens, could carry that boy; if his lungs held out. If not, he could drag him. He felt tender, like a mother, and enormous. It might be better to leave the boy there. There was no knowing. He said: 'Are you wounded?' The guns had mostly stopped. Tietjens could not see any blood flowing. The boy whispered 'No, sir!' He was, then, probably just faint. Shell shock, very likely. There was no knowing what shell shock was or what it did to you. Or the mere vapour of the projectile.

He could not stop there.

He took the boy under his arm as you might do a roll of blankets. If he took him on his shoulders he might get high enough to be sniped. He did not go very fast, his legs were so heavy. He bundled down several steps in the direction of the spring in which the boy had been. There was more water. The spring was filling up that hollow. He could not have left the boy there. You could only imagine that his body had corked up the spring-hole before. This had been like being at home where they had springs like that. On the moors, digging out badgers. Digging earth drains, rather. Badgers have dry lairs. On the moors above Groby. April sunlight. Lots of sunlight and skylarks.

He was mounting the mound. For some feet there was no other way. They had been left in the shaft made by that projectile. He inclined to the left. To the right would take them quicker to the trench, but he wanted to get the mound between them and the sniper. His breathing was tremendous. There was more light falling on them.

Exactly! . . . Snap! Snap! Snap! . . . Clear sounds from

a quarter of a mile away. . . . Bullets whined. Overhead. Long sounds, going away. Not snipers. The men of a battalion. A chance! Snap! Snap! Snap! Bullets whined overhead. Men of a battalion get excited when shooting at anything running. They fire high. Trigger pressure. *He* was now a fat, running object. Did they fire with a sense of hatred or fun! Hatred probably. Huns have not much sense of fun.

His breathing was unbearable. Both his legs were like painful bolsters. He would be on the relatively level in two steps if he made them. . . . Well, make them! . . . He was on the level. He had been climbing: up clods. He *had* to take an immense breath. The ground under his left foot gave way. He had been holding Aranjuez in front of his own body as much as he could, under his right arm. As his left foot sank in, the boy's body came right on top of him. Naturally this stiffish earth in huge clods had fissures in it. Apertures. It was not like regular digging.

The boy kicked, screamed, tore himself loose. . . . Well, if he wanted to go! The scream was like a horse's in a stable on fire. Bullets had gone overhead. The boy rushed off, his hands to his face. He disappeared round the mound. It was a conical mound. He, Tietjens, could now crawl on his belly. It was satisfactory.

He crawled. Shuffling himself along with his hips and elbows. There was probably a text-book way of crawling. He did not know it. The clods of earth appeared friendly. For bottom soil thrown to the top they did not feel or smell so very sour. Still, it would take a long time to get them into cultivation or under grass. Probably, agriculturally speaking, that country would be in a pretty poor condition for a long time. . . .

He felt pleased with his body. It had had no exercise to speak of for two months—as second-in-command. He could not have expected to be in even the condition he was in. But the mind had probably had a good deal to do with that! He had, no doubt, been in a devil of a funk. It was only reasonable. It was disagreeable to think of

those Hun devils hunting down the unfortunate. A disagreeable business. Still, we did the same. . . . That boy must have been in a devil of a funk. Suddenly. He had held his hands in front of his face. Afraid to see. Well, you couldn't blame him. They ought not to send out school-girls. He was like a girl. Still, he ought to have stayed to see that he, Tietjens, was not pipped. He might have thought he was hit from the way his left leg had gone down. He would have to be *strafed*. Gently.

Cockshott and the Corporal were on their hands and knees digging with the short-handled shovels that are known as trenching tools. They were on the rear side of the mound.

'We've found im, sir,' the Corporal said. 'Regular buried. Just seed his foot. Dursen't use a shovel. Might cut im in arf!'

Tietjens said:

'You're probably right. Give me the shovel!'

Cockshott was a draper's assistant, the Corporal a milkman. Very likely they were not good with shovels.

He had had the advantage of a boyhood crowded with digging of all sorts. Duckett was buried horizontally, running into the side of a conical mound. His feet at least stuck out like that, but you could not tell how the body was disposed. It might turn to either side or upwards. He said:

'Go on with your tools above! But give me room.'

The toes being to the sky, the trunk could hardly bend downwards. He stood below the feet and aimed terrific blows with the shovel eighteen inches below. He liked digging. This earth was luckily dryish. It ran down the hill conveniently. This man had been buried probably ten minutes. It seemed longer but it was probably less. He ought to have a chance. Probably earth was less suffocating than water. He said to the Corporal:

'Do you know how to apply artificial respiration?'

'To the drowned?'

Cockshott said:

'I do, sir. I was swimming champion of Islington baths!' A rather remarkable man, Cockshott. His father had knocked up the arm of a man who had tried to shoot Mr Gladstone in 1866 or thereabouts.

A lot of earth falling away, obligingly, after one withdrawal of the shovel Lance-Corporal Duckett's thin legs appeared to the fork, the knees dropping.

Cockshott said:

'E ain't rubbin' 'is ankles this journey!'

The Corporal said:

'Company Commander is killed, sir. Bullet clean thru the ed!'

It annoyed Tietjens that here was another head wound. He could not apparently get away from them. It was silly to be annoyed, because in trenches a majority of wounds had to be head wounds. But Providence might just as well be a little more imaginative. To oblige one. It annoyed him, too, to think that he had *strafed* that boy just before he was killed. For leaving his shovels about. A *strafe* leaves a disagreeable impression on young boys for quite half an hour. It was probably the last incident in his life. So he died depressed. . . . Might God be making it up to him!

He said to the Corporal:

'Let me come.' Duckett's left hand and wrist had appeared, the hand drooping and improbably clean, level with the thigh. It gave the line of the body; you could clear away beside him.

'E wasn't on'y twenty-two,' the Corporal said.

Cockshott said: 'Same age as me. Very particular e was about your rifle pull-throughs.'

A minute later they pulled Duckett out, by the legs. A stone might have been resting on his face, in that case his face would have been damaged. It wasn't, though you had had to chance it. It was black but asleep. . . . As if Valentine Wannop had been reposing in an ash-bin. Tietjens left Cockshott applying artificial respiration very methodically and efficiently to the prostrate form.

It was to him a certain satisfaction that, at any rate, in

that minute affair he hadn't lost one of the men but only an officer. As satisfaction it was not militarily correct, though as it harmed no one there was no harm in it. But for his men he always felt a certain greater responsibility; they seemed to him to be there infinitely less of their own volition. It was akin to the feeling that made him regard cruelty to an animal as a more loathsome crime than cruelty to a human being, other than a child. It was no doubt irrational.

Leaning, in the communication trench, against the corrugated iron that boasted a great whitewashed A, in a very clean thin Burberry boasting half a bushel of badges of rank—worsted crowns and things!—and in a small tin hat that looked elegant, was a slight figure. How the *devil* can you make a tin hat look elegant! It carried a hunting switch and wore spurs. An Inspecting General. The General said benevolently:

'Who are you?' and then with irritation: 'Where the devil is the officer commanding this Battalion? Why can't he be found?' He added: 'You're disgustingly dirty. Like a blackamoor. I suppose you've an explanation.'

Tietjens was being spoken to by General Campion. In a hell of a temper. He stood to attention like a scarecrow.

He said:

'I am in command of this Battalion, sir. I am Tietjens, second-in-command. Now in command temporarily. I could not be found because I was buried. Temporarily.'

The General said:

'You. . . Good God!' and fell back a step, his jaw dropping. He said: 'I've just come back from London!' And then: 'By God, you don't stop in command of a Battalion of mine a second after I take over!' He said: 'They said this was the smartest battalion in my unit!' and snorted with passion. He added: 'Neither my galloper nor Levin can find you or get you found. And there you come strolling along with your hands in your pockets!'

In the complete stillness, for, the guns having stopped, the skylarks, too, were taking a spell, Tietjens could hear

his heart beat, little dry scraping sounds out of his lungs. The heavy beats were very accelerated. It gave an effect of terror. He said to himself:

'What the devil has his having been in London to do with it?' And then: 'He wants to marry Sylvia! I'll bet he wants to marry Sylvia!' That was what his having been to London had to do with it. It was an obsession with him: the first thing he said when surprised and passionate.

They always arranged these periods of complete silence for the visits of Inspecting Generals. Perhaps the Great General Staffs of both sides arrange that for each other. More probably our guns had split themselves in the successful attempt to let the Huns know that we wanted them to shut up—that we were firing with what Papists call a special intention. That would be as effective as a telephone message. The Huns would know there was something up. Never put the other side in a temper when you can help it.

He said:

'I've just had a scratch, sir. I was feeling in my pockets for my field-dressing.'

The General said:

'A fellow like you has no right to be where he can be wounded. Your place is the lines of communication. I was mad when I sent you here. I shall send you back.'

He added:

'You can fall out. I want neither your assistance nor your information. They said there was a damn smart officer in command here. I wanted to see him. . . . Of the name of . . . Of the name of . . . It does not matter. Fall out. . . .'

Tietjens went heavily along the trench. It came into his head to say to himself:

'It is a land of Hope and Glory!' Then he exclaimed: 'By God! I'll take the thing before the Commander-in-Chief. I'll take the thing before the King in Council if necessary. By God I will!' The old fellow had no business to speak to him like that. It was importing personal enmity into service matters. He stood still reflecting on the terms of his letter

to Brigade. The Adjutant Notting came along the trench. He said:

'General Campion wants to see you, sir. He takes over this Army on Monday.' He added: 'You've been in a nasty place, sir. Not hurt, I trust!' It was a most unusual piece of loquacity for Notting.

Tietjens said to himself:

'Then I've got five days in command of this unit. He can't kick me out before he's in command.' The Huns would be through them before then. Five days' fighting! Thank God!

He said:

'Thanks. I've seen him. No, I'm all right. Beastly dirty!'

Notting's beady eyes had a tinge of agony in them. He said:

'When they said you had stopped one, sir, I thought I should go mad. We *can't* get through the work!'

Tietjens was wondering whether he should write his letter to Brigade before or after the old fellow took over. Notting was saying:

'The doctor says Aranjuez will get through all right.'

It would be better, if he were going to base his appeal on the grounds of personal prejudice. Notting was saying:

'Of course he will lose his eye. In fact it... it is not practically there. But he'll get through.'

PART THREE

I

COMING into the Square was like being suddenly dead, it was so silent and so still to one so lately jostled by the innumerable crowd and deafened by unceasing shouts. The shouting had continued for so long that it had assumed the appearance of being a solid and unvarying thing: like life. So the silence appeared like Death; and now she had death in her heart. She was going to confront a madman in a stripped house. And the empty house stood in an empty square all of whose houses were so eighteenth-century and silver-grey and rigid and serene that they ought all to be empty too and contain dead, mad men. And was this the errand? For to-day when all the world was mad with joy? To become bear-ward to a man who had got rid of all his furniture and did not know the porter—mad without joy!

It turned out to be worse than she expected. She had expected to turn the handle of a door of a tall empty room; in a space made dim with shutters she would see him, looking suspiciously round over his shoulder, a grey badger or a bear taken at its dim occupations. And in uniform. But she was not given time even to be ready. In the last moment she was to steel herself incredibly. She was to become the cold nurse of a shell-shock case.

But there was not any last moment. He charged upon her. There in the open. More like a lion. He came, grey all over, his grey hair—or the grey patches of his hair—shining, charging down the steps, having slammed the hall door. And lopsided. He was carrying under his arm a diminutive piece of furniture. A cabinet.

It was so quick. It was like having a fit. The houses tottered. He regarded her. He had presumably checked violently in his clumsy stride. She hadn't seen because of the tottering of the houses. His stone-blue eyes came fishily into place in his wooden countenance—pink and white. *Too* pink where it was pink and too white where it was white. Too much so for health. He was in grey homespuns. He should not wear homespuns or grey. It increased his bulk. He could be made to look . . . Oh, a fine figure of a man, let us say!

What was he doing? Fumbling in the pocket of his clumsy trousers. He exclaimed—she shook at the sound of his slightly grating, slightly gasping voice:

'I'm going to sell this thing. . . . Stay here.' He had produced a latchkey. He was panting fiercely beside her. Up the steps. He was beside her. Beside her. Beside her. It was infinitely sad to be beside this madman. It was infinitely glad. Because if he had been sane she would not have been beside him. She could be beside him for long spaces of time if he were mad. Perhaps he did not recognize her! She might be beside him for long spaces of time with him not recognizing her. Like tending your baby!

He was stabbing furiously at the latchhole with his little key. He *would*: that was normal. He was a stab-the-key-hole sort of clumsy man. She would not want that altered. But she would see about his clothes. She said: 'I am deliberately preparing to live with him for a long time!' Think of that! She said to him:

'Did you send for me?'

He had the door open: he said, panting—his *poor* lungs!:

'No.' Then: 'Go in!' and then: 'I was just going. . . .'

She was in his house. Like a child. . . . He had not sent for her. . . . Like a child faltering on the sill of a vast black cave.

It *was* black. Stone flags. Pompeian red walls scarred pale-pink where fixed hall furniture had been removed. Was it *here* she was going to live?

He said, panting, from behind her back:

'Wait here!' A little more light fell into the hall. That was because he was gone from the doorway.

He was charging down the steps. His boots were immense. He lolloped all over on one side because of the piece of furniture he had under his arm. He was grotesque, really. But joy radiated from his homespuns when you walked beside him. It welled out; it enveloped you. . . . Like the warmth from an electric heater, only that did not make you want to cry and say your prayers—the haughty oaf.

No, but he was not haughty. *Gauche*, then! No, but he was not *gauche*. . . . She would not run after him. He was a bright patch, with his pink ears and silver hair. Gallumphing along the rails in front of the eighteenth-century houses. *He* was eighteenth-century all right. . . . But then the eighteenth century never went mad. The only century that never went mad. Until the French Revolution: and that was either not mad or not eighteenth century.

She stepped irresolutely into the shadows; she returned irresolutely to the light. . . . A long hollow sound existed: the sea saying: *Ow, Ow, Ow* along miles and miles. It was the armistice. It was Armistice Day. She had forgotten it. She was to be cloistered on Armistice Day! Ah, not cloistered! Not cloistered there. My beloved is mine and I am his! But she might as well close the door!

She closed the door as delicately as if she were kissing him on the lips. It was a symbol. It was Armistice Day. She ought to go away; instead she had shut the door on . . . Not on Armistice Day! What was it like to be . . . changed!

No! She ought not to go away! She ought not to go away! She ought *not*! He had told her to wait. She was not cloistered. This was the most exciting spot on the earth. It was not her fate to live nun-like. She was going to pass her day beside a madman: her night, too. . . . Armistice Night! That night would be remembered down unnumbered generations. Whilst one lived that had seen it the question would be asked: What did you do on Armistice Night? My beloved is mine and I am his!

The great stone stairs were carpetless: to mount them

would be like taking part in a procession. The hall came in straight from the front door. You had to turn a corner to the right before you came to the entrance of a room. A queer arrangement. Perhaps the eighteenth century was afraid of draughts and did not like the dining-room door near the front entrance. . . . My beloved is . . . Why does one go on repeating that ridiculous thing? Besides it's from the *Song of Solomon*, isn't it? *The Canticle of Canticles*! Then to quote it is blasphemy when one is . . . No, the essence of prayer is volition, so the essence of blasphemy is volition. She did not want to quote the thing. It was jumped out of her by sheer nerves. She was afraid. She was waiting for a madman in an empty house. Noises whispered up the empty stairway!

She was like Fatima. Pushing open the door of the empty room. He might come back to murder her. A madness caused by sex obsessions is not infrequently homicidal. . . . What did you do on Armistice Night? 'I was murdered in an empty house?' For, no doubt he would let her live till midnight.

But perhaps he had not got sex-obsessions. She had not the shadow of a proof that he had; rather that he hadn't! Certainly, rather that he hadn't. Always the gentleman.

They had left the telephone! The windows were duly shuttered but in the dim light from between cracks the nickel gleamed on white marble. The mantel-shelf. Pure Parian marble, the shelf supported by rams' heads. Singularly chaste. The ceilings and rectilinear mouldings in an intricate symmetry. Chaste, too. Eighteenth century. But the eighteenth century was not chaste. . . . *He* was eighteenth century.

She ought to telephone to her mother to inform that Eminence in untidy black with violet tabs here and there of the grave step that her daughter was . . .

What was her daughter going to do?

She ought to rush out of the empty house. She ought to be trembling with fear at the thought that he was coming home very likely to murder her. But she wasn't. What was

she? Trembling with ecstasy? Probably. At the thought that he was coming. If he murdered her. . . . Can't be helped! She was trembling with ecstasy all the same. She must telephone to her mother. Her mother might want to know where she was. But her mother never *did* want to know where she was. She had her head too screwed on to get into mischief! . . . Think of *that*!

Still, on such a day her mother might like to. They ought to exchange gladnesses that her brother was safe for good now. And others, too. Normally her mother was irritated when she rang up. She would be at her work. It was amazing to see her at work. Perhaps she never would again. Such untidiness of papers. In a little room. Quite a little room. She never would work in a big room because a big room tempted her to walk about and she could not afford the time to walk about.

She was writing at two books at once now. A novel. . . . Valentine did not know what it was about. Her mother never let them know what her novels were about till they were finished. And a woman's history of the War. A history by a woman for women. And there she would be sitting at a large table that hardly left room for more than getting round it. Grey, large, generous-featured and tired, she would be poking over one set of papers on one side of the table or just getting up from over the novel, her loose pince-nez falling off, pushing round the table between its edge and the wall to peer at the sheets of the woman's history that were spread all over that region. She would work for ten minutes or twenty-five or an hour at the one and then an hour and a half or half an hour or three-quarters at the other. What a muddle her dear old head must be in!

With a little trepidation she took the telephone. It had got to be done. She could not live with Christopher Tietjens without first telling her mother. Her mother ought to be given the chance of dissuading. They say you ought to give a lover a chance of a final scene before leaving him or her for good. Still more your mother. That was jannock.

It broke the word of promise to the ear, the telephone! . . . Was it blasphemy to quote Shakespeare when one was going to. . . Perhaps bad taste. Shakespeare, however, was not spotless. So they said. . . Waiting! Waiting! How much of one's life wasn't spent waiting, with one's weight boring one's heels into the ground. . . But *this* thing was dead. No roar came from its mouth and when you jabbed the little gadget at the side up and down no bell tinkled. . . It had probably been disconnected. They had perhaps cut him off for not paying. Or he had cut it off so that she might not scream for the police through it whilst he was strangling her. Anyhow they were cut off. They would be cut off from the world on Armistice Night. . . Well, they would probably be cut off for good!

What nonsense. He had not known that she was coming. He had not asked her to come.

So, slowly, slowly she went up the great stone staircase, the noises all a-whispering up before her . . . 'So, slowly, slowly she went up and slowly looked about her. Henceforth take warning by the fall. . . ' Well, she did not need to take warning: she was not going to fall in the way Barbara Allen did. Contrariwise!

He had not sent for her. He had not asked Edith Ethel to ring her up. Then presumably she felt humiliated. But she did not feel humiliated! It was in effect fairly natural. He *was* quite noticeably mad, rushing out, lopsided, with bits of furniture under his arm and no hat on his noticeable hair. Noticeable! That was what he was. He would never pass in a crowd! . . . He *had* got rid of all his furniture as Edith Ethel had alleged. Very likely he had not recognized the porter, too. She, Valentine Wannop, had seen him going to sell his furniture. Madly! Running to it. You do not run when you are selling furniture if you are sane. Perhaps Edith Ethel had seen him running along with a table on his head. And she was by no means certain that he had recognized her, Valentine Wannop!

So Edith Ethel might have been almost justified in ringing her up. Normally it would have been an offence, con-

sidering the terms on which they had parted. Considering that Edith Ethel had accused her of having had a child by this very man! It was pretty strong, even if she had seen him running about the Square with furniture, and even if there had been no one else who could help. . . . But she ought to have sent her miserable rat of a husband. There was no excuse!

Still, there had been nothing else for her, Valentine, to do. So there was not call for her to feel humiliated. Even if she had not felt for this man as she did she would have come, and, if he had been very bad, would have stayed.

He had not sent for her! This man who had once proposed love to her and then had gone away without a word and who had never so much as sent her a picture-postcard! Gauche! Haughty! Was there any other word for him? There could not be. Then she ought to feel humiliated. But she did not.

She felt frightened, creeping up the great staircase, and entering a great room. A very great room. All white; again with stains on the walls from which things had been removed. From over the way the houses confronted her, eighteenth-centuryishly. But with a touch of gaiety from their red chimney-pots. . . . And now she was spying: with her heart in her mouth. She was terribly frightened. This room was inhabited. As if set down in a field, the room being so large, there camped. . . . A camp-bed for the use of officers, G.S. one, as the saying is. And implements of green canvas, supported on crossed white-wood staves: a chair, a bucket with a rope handle, a washing-basin, a table. The bed was covered over with a flea-bag of brown wool. She was terribly frightened. The further she penetrated the house the more she was at his mercy. She ought to have stayed downstairs. She was spying on him.

These things looked terribly sordid and forlorn. Why did he place them in the centre of the room? Why not against a wall? It was usual to stand the head of a bed against a wall when there is no support for the pillows. Then the

pillows do not slip off. She would change. . . . No, she would not. He had put the bed in the centre of the room because he did not want it to touch walls that had been brushed by the dress of. . . . You must not think bad things about that woman!

They did not look sordid and forlorn. They looked frugal. And glorious! She bent down and drawing down the flea bag at the top, kissed the pillows. She would get him linen pillows. You would be able to get linen now. The war was over. All along that immense line men could stand up!

At the head of the room was a dais. A box of square boarding, like the model-throne artists have in studios. Surely she did not receive her guests on a dais: like Royalty. She was capable. . . . *You must not.* . . . It was perhaps for a piano. Perhaps she gave concerts. It was used as a library now. A row of calf-bound books stood against the wall on the back edge of the platform. She approached them to see what books he had selected. They must be the books he had read in France. If she could know what books he had read in France she would know what some of his thoughts there had been. She knew he slept between very cheap cotton sheets.

Frugal and glorious. That was he! And he had designed this room to love her in. It was the room she would have asked. . . . The furnishing. . . . Alcestis never had. . . . For she, Valentine Wannop, was of frugal mind, too. And his worshipper, Having reflected glory. . . . Damn it, she was getting soppy. But it was curious how their tastes marched together. He had been neither haughty nor gauche. He had paid her the real compliment. He had said: 'Her mind so marches with mine that she will understand.'

The books were indeed a job lot. Their tops ran along against the wall like an ill-arranged range of hills; one was a great folio in calf, the title indented deep and very dim. The others were French novels and little red military text books. She leaned over the dais to read the title of the tall book. She expected it to be Herbert's Poems or his

Country Parson. . . . He ought to be a Country Parson. He never would be now. She was depriving the church of. . . . Of a Higher Mathematician, really. The title of the book was Vir Obscur.

Why did she take it that they were going to live together? She had no official knowledge that he wanted to. But *they* wanted to TALK. You can't talk unless you live together. Her eye, travelling downwards along the dais, caught words on paper. They threw themselves up at her from among a disorder of half-a-dozen typed pages; they were in big, firm, pencilled letters. They stood out because they were pencilled; they were:

A man could stand up on a bleedin' 'ill!

Her heart stopped. She must be out of condition. She could not stand very well, but there was nothing to lean on to. She had—she didn't know she had—read also the typed words:

'Mrs Tietjens is leaving the model cabinet by Barker of Bath which she believes you claim. . . .'

She looked desperately away from the letter. She did not want to read the letter. She could not move away. She believed she was dying. Joy never kills. . . . But it. . . . '*fait peur*'. 'Makes Afraid.' Afraid! Afraid! Afraid! There was nothing now between them. It was as if they were already in each other's arms. For surely the rest of the letter must say that Mrs Tietjens had removed the furniture. And his comment—amazingly echoing the words she had just thought—was that he could stand up. But it wasn't in the least amazing. My beloved is mine. . . . Their thoughts marched together; not in the least amazing. They could now stand on a hill together. Or get into a little hole. For good. And talk. For ever. She must not read the rest of the letter. She must not be certain. If she were certain she would have no hope of preserving her. . . . Of remaining. . . . Afraid and unable to move. She would be forced to read the letter because she was unable to move. Then she would be lost. She looked beseechingly out of the window at the house-fronts over the way. They were

friendly. They would help her. Eighteenth century. Cynical, but not malignant. She sprang right off her feet. She could move then. She hadn't had a fit. Idiot. It was only the telephone. It went on and on. Drrinn; drinnnn; d.r.R.I.n.n. It came from just under her feet. No, from under the dais. The receiver was on the dais. She hadn't consciously noticed it because she had believed the telephone was dead. Who notices a dead telephone?

She said—it was as if she were talking into his ear, he so pervaded her—she said:

'Who are you?'

One ought not to answer all telephone calls, but one does so mechanically. She ought not to have answered this. She was in a compromising position. Her voice might be recognized. Let it be recognized. She desired to be known to be in a compromising position! What did you do on Armistice Day!

A voice, heavy and old, said:

'You *are* there, Valentine. . . .'

She cried out:

'Oh, poor *mother*. . . . But he's not here.' She added, 'He's not been here with me. I'm still only waiting.' She added again: 'The house is empty!' She seemed to be stealthy, the house whispering round her. She seemed to be whispering to her mother to save her and not wanting the house to hear her. The house was eighteenth century. Cynical. But not malignant. It wanted her undoing but it knew that women liked being . . . ruined.

Her mother said, after a long time:

'Have you *got* to do this thing? . . . My little Valentine . . . My little Valentine!' She wasn't sobbing.

Valentine said:

'Yes, I've got to do it!' She sobbed. Suddenly she stopped sobbing.

She said quickly:

'Listen, mother. I've had no conversation with him. I don't know even whether he's sane. He appears to be mad.' She wanted to give her mother hope. Quickly. She had

been speaking quickly to get hope to her mother as quickly as possible. But she added: 'I believe that I shall die if I cannot live with him.'

She said that slowly. She wanted to be like a little child trying to get truth home to its mother.

She said:

'I have waited too long. All these years.' She did not know that she had such desolate tones in her voice. She could see her mother looking into the distance with every statement that came to her, thinking. Old and grey. And majestic and kind. . . . Her mother's voice came:

'I have sometimes suspected. . . . My poor child. . . . It has been for a long time?' They were both silent. Thinking. Her mother said:

'There isn't any practical way out?' She pondered for a long time. 'I take it you have thought it all out. I know you have a good head and you are good.' A rustling sound. 'But I am not level with these times. I should be glad if there were a way out. I should be glad if you could wait for each other. Or perhaps find a legal . . .'

Valentine said:

'Oh, mother, don't cry!' . . . 'Oh, mother, I can't. . . .'
. . . 'Oh, I will come. . . . Mother, I will come back to you if you order it.' With each phrase her body was thrown about as if by a wave. She thought they only did that on the stage. Her eyes said to her:

. . . 'Dear Sir,

'Our client, Mrs Christopher Tietjens of Groby-in-Cleveland . . .'

They said:

'After the occurrence at the Base-Camp at . . .'

They said:

'Thinks it useless . . .'

She was agonized for her mother's voice. The telephone hummed in E flat. It tried B. Then it went back to E flat. Her eyes said:

'Proposes when occasion offers to remove to Groby . . .'

in fat, blue typescript. She cried agonizedly:

'Mother. Order me to come back or it will be too late. . . .'

She had looked down, unthinkingly . . . as one does when standing at the telephone. If she looked down again and read to the end of the sentence that contained the words: 'It is useless,' it would be too late! She would know that his wife had given him up!

Her mother's voice came turned by the means of its conveyance into the voice of a machine of Destiny.

'No, I can't. I am thinking.'

Valentine placed her foot on the dais at which she stood. When she looked down it covered the letter. She thanked God. Her mother's voice said:

'I cannot order you to come back if it would kill you not to be with him.' Valentine could feel her late-Victorian advanced mind, desperately seeking for the right plea—for any plea that would let her do without seeming to employ maternal authority. She began to talk like a book: an august Victorian book; Morley's *Life of Gladstone*. That was reasonable: she wrote books like that.

She said they were both good creatures of good stock. If their consciences let them commit themselves to a certain course of action they were probably in the right. But she begged them, in God's name to assure themselves that their consciences *did* urge that course. She *had* to talk like a book!

Valentine said:

'It is nothing to do with conscience.' That seemed harsh. Her mind was troubled with a quotation. She could not find it. Quotations ease strain; she said: 'One is urged by blind destiny!' A Greek quotation, then! 'Like a victim upon an altar. I am afraid; but I consent!' . . . Probably Euripides; the *Alkestis* very likely! If it had been a Latin author the phrases would have occurred to her in Latin. Being with her mother made her talk like a book. Her mother talked like a book: then *she* did. They *must*; if they did not they would scream. . . . But they were English

ladies. Of scholarly habits of mind. It was horrible. Her mother said:

'That is probably the same as conscience—race conscience!' She could not urge on them the folly and disastrousness of the course they appeared to propose. She had, she said, known too many irregular unions that had been worthy of emulation and too many regular ones that were miserable and a cause of demoralization by their examples. . . . She was a gallant soul. She could not in conscience go back on the teachings of her whole life. She wanted to. Desperately! Valentine could feel the almost physical strainings of her poor, tired brain. But she could not recant. She was not Cranmer! She was not even Joan of Arc. So she went on repeating:

'I can only beg and pray you to assure yourself that not to live with that man will cause you to die or be seriously mentally injured. If you think you can live without him or wait for him, if you think there is any hope of later union without serious mental injury I beg and pray . . .'

She could not finish the sentence. . . . It was fine to behave with dignity at the crucial moment of your life! It was fitting: it was proper. It justified your former philosophic life. And it was cunning. Cunning!

For now she said:

'My child! my little child! You have sacrificed all your life to me and my teaching. How can I ask you now to deprive yourself of the benefit of them?'

She said:

'I *can't* persuade you to a course that might mean your eternal unhappiness!' . . . The *can't* was like a flame of agony!

Valentine shivered. That was cruel pressure. Her mother was no doubt doing her duty; but it was cruel pressure. It was very cold. November is a cold month. There were foot-steps on the stairs. She shook.

'Oh, he is coming. He is coming!' she cried out. She wanted to say: 'Save me!' She said: 'Don't go away! Don't. . . Don't go away!' What do men do to you: men you

love? Mad men. He was carrying a sack. The sack was the first she saw as he opened the door. Pushed it open; it was already half-open. A sack was a dreadful thing for a madman to carry. In an empty house. He dumped the sack down on the hearth stone. He had coal dust on his right forehead. It was a heavy sack. Bluebeard would have had in it the corpse of his first wife. Borrow says that the gipsies say: 'Never trust a young man with grey hair!'. . . He had only half-grey hair and he was only half young. He was panting. He must be stopped carrying heavy sacks. Panting like a fish. A great, motionless carp, hung in a tank.

He said:

'I suppose you would want to go out. If you don't we will have a fire. You can't stop here without a fire.'

At the same moment her mother said:

'If that is Christopher I will speak to him.'

She said away from the mouthpiece:

'Yes, let's go out. Oh, oh, oh. Let's go out. . . . Armistice. . . . My mother wants to speak to you.' She felt herself to be suddenly a little Cockney shop-girl. A midinette in an imitation Girl Guide's uniform. 'Afride of the gentleman, my dear.' Surely one could protect oneself against a great carp! She could throw him over her shoulder. She had enough Ju Jitsu for that. Of course a little person trained to Ju Jitsu can't overcome an untrained giant if he expects it. But if he doesn't expect it she can.

His right hand closed over her left wrist. He had swum towards her and had taken the telephone in his left. One of the window panes was so old it was bulging and purplish. There was another. There were several. But the first one was the purplishest. He said:

'Christopher Tietjens speaking!' He could not think of anything more *recherché* to say than that—the great inarticulate fellow! His hand was cool on her wrist. She was calm but streaming with bliss. There was no other word for it. As if you had come out of a bath of warm nectar and bliss streamed off you. His touch had calmed her and covered her with bliss.

He let her wrist go very slowly. To show that the grasp was meant for a caress! It was their first caress!

Before she had surrendered the telephone she had said to her mother:

'He doesn't know. . . . Oh, realize that he doesn't know!'

She went to the other end of the room and stood watching him.

He heard the telephone from its black depths say:

'How are you, my dear boy? My dear, dear boy; you're safe for good.' It gave him a disagreeable feeling. This was the mother of the young girl he intended to seduce. He intended to. He said:

'I'm pretty well. Weakish. I've just come out of hospital. Four days ago.' He was never going back to that bloody show. He had his application for demobilization in his pocket. The voice said:

'Valentine thinks you are very ill. Very ill, indeed. She came to you because she thinks that.' She hadn't come, then, because. . . . But, of course, she would not have. But she might have wanted them to spend Armistice Day together! She might have! A sense of disappointment went over him. Discouragement. He was very raw. That old devil, Campion! Still, one ought not to be as raw as that. He was saying, deferentially:

'Oh, it was mental rather than physical. Though I had pneumonia all right.' He went on saying that General Campion had put him in command over the escorts of German prisoners all through the Lines of several Armies. That really nearly had driven him mad. He couldn't bear being a beastly gaoler.

Still—Still!—he saw those grey spectral shapes that had surrounded and interpenetrated all his later days. The image came over him with the mood of repulsion at odd moments—at the very oddest; without suggestion there floated before his eyes the image, the landscape of greyish forms. In thousands, seated on upturned buckets, with tins of fat from which they ate at their sides on the ground,

holding up newspapers that were not really newspapers; on grey days. They were all round him. And he was their gaoler. He said: 'A filthy job!'

Mrs Wannop's voice said:

'Still, it's kept you alive for us!'

He said:

'I sometimes wish it hadn't!' He was astonished that he had said it; he was astonished at the bitterness of his voice. He added: 'I don't mean that in cold blood of course,' and he was again astonished at the deference in his voice. He was leaning down, positively, as if over a very distinguished, elderly, seated lady. He straightened himself. It struck him as distasteful hypocrisy to bow before an elderly lady when you entertained designs upon her daughter. Her voice said:

'My dear boy . . . my dear, almost son. . . .'

Panic overcame him. There was no mistaking those tones. He looked round at Valentine. She had her hands together as if she were wringing them. She said, exploring his face painfully with her eyes:

'Oh, be kind to her. Be kind to her. . . .'

Then there had been revelation of their . . . you couldn't call it intimacy!

He never liked her Girl Guides' uniform. He liked her best in a white sweater and a fawn-coloured short skirt. She had taken off her hat—her cowboyish hat. She had had her hair cut. Her fair hair.

Mrs Wannop said:

'I've got to think that you have saved us. . . . To-day I have to think that you have saved us. . . . And of all you have suffered.' Her voice was melancholy, slow, and lofty.

Intense, hollow reverberations filled the house. He said:

'That's nothing. That's over. You don't have to think of it.'

The reverberations apparently reached her ear. She said:

'I can't hear you. There seems to be thunder.'

External silence came back. He said:

'I was telling you not to think of my sufferings.'

She said:

'Can't you wait? You and she? Is there *no* . . .' The reverberations began again. When he could again hear she was saying:

'Has had to contemplate such contingencies arising for one's child. It is useless to contend with the tendency of one's age. But I had hoped . . .'

The knocker below gave three isolated raps, but the echoes prolonged them. He said to Valentine:

'That's the knocking of a drunken man. But then half the population might well be drunk. If they knock again, go down and send them away.'

She said:

'I'll go in any case before they can knock again.'

She heard him say as she left the room—she could not help waiting for the end of the sentence: she *must* gather all that she could as to that agonizing interview between her mother and her lover. Equally, she must go or she would go mad. It was no good saying that her head was screwed on straight. It wasn't. It was as if it contained two balls of string with two ends. On the one her mother pulled, on the other, he. . . . She heard him say:

'I don't know. One has desperate need. Of talk. I have not really spoken to a soul for two years!' Oh, blessed, adorable man! She heard him going on, getting into a stride of talk:

'It's that that's desperate. I'll tell you. I'll give you an instance. I was carrying a boy. Under rifle-fire. His eye got knocked out. If I had left him where he was his eye would not have been knocked out. I thought at the time that he might have been drowned, but I ascertained afterwards that the water never rose high enough. So I am responsible for the loss of his eye. It's a sort of monomania. You see, I am talking of it now. It recurs. Continuously. And to have to bear it in complete solitude . . .'

She was not frightened going now down the great stairs. They whispered, but she was like a calm Fatima. *He* was

Sister Anne, and a brother, too. The enemy was fear. She must not fear. He rescued her from fear. It is to a woman that you must come for refuge from regrets about a boy's eyes.

Her physical interior turned within her. He had been under fire! He might never have been there, a grey badger, a tender, tender grey badger leaning down and holding a telephone. Explaining things with tender care. It was lovely how he spoke to her mother; it was lovely that they were all three together. But her mother would keep them apart. She was taking the only way to keep them apart if she was talking to him as she had talked to her.

There was no knowing. She had heard him say:

He was pretty well. . . . 'Thank God!' . . . Weakish . . . 'Ah, give *me* the chance to cherish him!' . . . He had just come out of hospital. Four days ago. He had had pneumonia all right, but it had been mental rather than physical. . . .

Ah, the dreadful thing about the whole war was that it had been—the suffering had been—mental rather than physical. And they had not thought of it. . . . He had been under fire. She had pictured him always as being in a Base, thinking. If he had been killed it would not have been so dreadful for him. But now he had come back with his obsessions and mental troubles. . . . And he needed his woman. And her mother was forcing him to abstain from his woman! That was what was terrible. He had suffered mental torture and now his pity was being worked on to make him abstain from the woman that could atone.

Hitherto, she had thought of the War as physical suffering only: now she saw it only as mental torture. Immense miles and miles of anguish in darkened minds. That remained. Men might stand up on hills, but the mental torture could not be expelled.

She ran suddenly down the steps that remained to her and was fumbling at the bolts of the front door. She was not skilful at that: she was thinking about the conversation that dreadfully she felt to be continuing. She must stop

the knocking. The knocker had stayed for just long enough for the abstention of an impatient man knocking on a great door. Her mother was too cunning for them. With the cunning that makes the mother wild-duck tumble apparently broken-winged just under your feet to decoy you away from her little things. STORGE, Gilbert White calls it! For, of course, she could never have his lips upon hers when she thought of that crafty, beloved, grey Eminence sitting at home and shuddering. . . . But she *would*!

She found the gadget that opened the door—the third she had tried amongst incomprehensible, painted century-old fixings. The door came open exactly upon a frustrated sound. A man was being propelled towards her by the knocker to which he held. . . . She had saved *his* thoughts. Without the interruption of the knocker he might be able to see that mother's device was just cunning. They were cunning, the great Victorians. . . . Oh, poor mother!

A horrible man in uniform looked at her hatefully, with piercing, hollow, black eyes in a fallen away face. He said:

'I must see that fellow Tietjens; you're not Tietjens!' As if she were defrauding him. 'It's urgent,' he said. 'About a sonnet. I was dismissed the Army yesterday. *His* doing. And Campion's. His wife's lover!'

She said fiercely:

'He's engaged. You can't see him. If you want to see him you must wait!' She felt horror that Tietjens should ever have had to do with such a brute beast. He was unshaven; black. And filled with hatred. He raised his voice to say:

'I'm McKechnie. Captain McKechnie of the ninth. Vice-Chancellor's Latin Prizeman! One of the Old Pals!' He added: 'Tietjens forced himself in on the Old Pals!'

She felt the contempt of the scholar's daughter for the Prizeman; she felt that Apollo with Admetus was as nothing for sheer disgust compared with Tietjens buried in a band of such beings.

She said:

'It is not necessary to shout. You can come in and wait.'

At all costs Tietjens must finish his conversation with her mother undisturbed. She led this fellow round the corner of the hall. A sort of wireless emanation seemed to connect her with the upper conversation. She was aware of it going on, through the wall above, diagonally; then through the ceiling in perpendicular waves. It seemed to work inside her head, her end of it, like waves, churning her mind.

She opened the shutters of the empty room round the corner, on the right. She did not wish to be alone in the dark with this hating man. She did not dare to go up and warn Tietjens. At all costs he must not be disturbed. It was not fair to call what her mother was doing, cunning. It was instinct, set in her breast by the Almighty, as the saying is. . . . Still, it was early Victorian instinct! Tremendously cunning in itself.

The hateful man was grumbling:

'He's been sold up, I see. That's what comes of selling your wife to Generals. To get promotion. They're a cunning lot. But he overreached himself. Campion went back on him. But Campion, too, overreached *himself*. . . .'

She was looking out of the window, across the green square. Light was an agreeable thing. You could breathe more deeply when it was light. . . . Early Victorian instinct! . . . The Mid-Victorians had had to loosen the bonds. Her mother, to be in the van of Mid-Victorian thought, had had to allow virtue to 'irregular unions'. As long as they were high-minded. But the high-minded do not consummate irregular unions. So all her books had showed you high-minded creatures contracting irregular unions of the mind or of sympathy; but never carrying them to the necessary conclusion. They would have been ethically at liberty but they didn't. They ran with the ethical hare, but hunted with the ecclesiastical hounds. . . . Still, of course, she could not go back on her premises just because it was her own daughter!

She said:

'I beg your pardon!' to that fellow. He had been saying:

'They're too damn cunning. They overreach themselves!'

Her mind spun. She did not know what he had been talking about. Her mind retained his words, but she did not understand what they meant. She had been sunk in the contemplation of Early Victorian Thought. She remembered the long—call it 'liaison'—of Edith Ethel Duchemin and little Vincent Macmaster. Edith Ethel, swathed in opaque crêpe, creeping widow-like along the very palings she could see across the square, to her high-minded adulteries, amidst the whispered applause of Mid-Victorian England. So circumspect and right! . . . She had her thoughts to keep, all right. Well under control! . . . Well, she had been patient.

The man said agonizedly:

'My filthy, bloody, swinish uncle, Vincent Macmaster. Sir Vincent Macmaster! And this fellow Tietjens. All in a league against me. . . . Champion too . . . But he overreached himself. . . . A man got into Tietjens' wife's bedroom. At the Base. And Champion sent him to the front. To get him killed. Her other lover, you see?'

She listened. She listened with all her attention straining. She wanted to be able to . . . She did not know what she wanted to be able to do! The man said:

'Major-General Lord Edward Champion, V.C., K.C.M.G., tantivy tum tum, etcetera. Too cunning. Too b——y cunning by half. Sent Tietjens to the front too to get him killed. Me too. We all three went up to Division in a box-car—Tietjens, his wife's lover, and me. Tietjens confessed that bleedin' swab. Like a beastly monk. Told him that when you die—in *articulo mortis*, but you won't understand what that means!—your faculties are so numbed that you feel neither pain nor fear. He said that death was no more than an anaesthetic. And that trembling, whining pup drank it in. . . . I can see them now. In a box-car. In a cutting.'

She said:

'You've had shell-shock? You've got shell-shock now!'

He said, like a badger snapping:

'I haven't. I've got a bad wife. Like Tietjens. At least she

isn't a bad wife. She's a woman with appetites. She satisfies her appetites. That's why they're hoofing me out of the Army. But at least, I don't sell her to Generals. To Major-General Lord Edward Campion, V.C., K.C.M.G., etc. I got divorce leave and didn't divorce her. Then I got second divorce leave. And didn't divorce her. It's against my principles. She lives with a British Museum Palaeontologist and he'd lose his job. I owe that fellow Tietjens a hundred and seventy quid. Over my second divorce leave. I can't pay him. I didn't divorce, but I've spent the money. Going about with my wife and her friend. On principle!'

He spoke so inexhaustibly and fast, and his topics changed so quickly that she could do no more than let the words go into her ears. She listened to the words and stored them up. One main line of topic held her; otherwise she could not think. She only let her eyes run over the friezes of the opposite houses. She gathered that Tietjens had been unjustly dismissed by Campion, whilst saving two lives under fire. McKechnie grudgingly admitted heroism to Tietjens in order to blacken the General. The General wanted Sylvia Tietjens. So as to get her he had sent Tietjens into the hottest part of the line. But Tietjens had refused to get killed. He had a charmed life. That was Provvy spiting the General. All the same, Providence could not like Tietjens, a cully who comforted his wife's lover. A dirty thing to do. When Tietjens would not be killed the General came down into the Line and *strafed* him to Hell. Didn't she, Valentine, understand why? He wanted Tietjens cashiered so that he, Campion, might be less disgustingly disgraced for taking up with the wife. But he had overreached himself. You can't be cashiered for not being on the spot to lick a General's boots when you are saving life under rifle-fire. So the General had to withdraw his words and find Tietjens a dirty scavenger's job. Made a bleedin' gaoler of him!

She was standing in the doorway so that this fellow should not run upstairs to where the conversation was going on. The windows consoled her. She only gathered

that Tietjens had had great mental trouble. He must have. She knew nothing of either Sylvia Tietjens or the General except for their beautiful looks. But Tietjens must have had great mental trouble. Dreadful!

It was hateful. How could she stand it! But she must, to keep this fellow from Tietjens, who was talking to her mother.

And . . . if his wife was a bad wife, didn't it . . .

The windows were consoling. A little dark boy of an officer passed the railings of the house, looking up at the windows.

McKechnie had talked himself hoarse. He was coughing. He began to complain that his uncle, Sir Vincent Macmaster, had refused him an introduction to the Foreign Office. He had made a scene at the Macmasters' already that morning. Lady Macmaster—a haggard wanton, if there ever was one—had refused him access to his uncle, who was suffering from nervous collapse. He said suddenly:

'Now about this sonnet: I'm at least going to show this fellow . . . ' Two more officers, one short, the other tall, passed the window. They were laughing and calling out. ' . . . that I'm a better Latinist than he. . . . '

She sprang into the hall. Thunder again had come from the door.

In the light outside a little officer with his half profile towards her seemed to be listening. Beside him was a thin lady, very tall. At the bottom of the steps were two laughing Officers. The boy, his eye turned towards her, with a shrinking timidity you would have said, exclaimed in a soft voice:

'We've come for Major Tietjens. . . . This is Nancy. Of Bailleul, you know!' He had turned his face still more towards the lady. She was unreasonably thin and tall, the face of her skin drawn. She was much the older. Much. And hostile. She must have put on a good deal of colour. Purplish. Dressed in black. She ducked a little.

Valentine said:

'I'm afraid. . . . He's engaged. . . . '

The boy said:

'Oh, but he'll see us. This is Nancy, you know!'

One of the officers said:

'We said we'd look old Tietjens up. . . .' He had only one arm. She was losing her head. The boy had a blue band round his hat. She said:

'But he's dreadfully urgently engaged. . . .'

The boy turned his face full on her with a gesture of entreaty.

'Oh, but . . .' he said. She nearly fell, stepping back. His eye-socket contained nothing: a disorderly reddish scar. It made him appear to be peering blindly; the absence of the one eye blotted out the existence of the other. He said in Oriental pleading tones:

'The Major saved my life; I must see him!' The sleeveless officer called out:

'We said we'd look old Tietjens up. . . . IT's armi . . . hick. . . . At Rouen in the pub. . . .' The boy continued:

'I'm Aranjuez, you know! Aranjuez. . . .' They had only been married last week. He was going to the Indian Army to-morrow. They *must* spend Armistice Day with the Major. Nothing would be anything without the Major. They had a table at the Holborn.

The third officer: he was a very dark, silky-voiced, young Major, crept slowly up the steps, leaning on a stick, his dark eyes on her face.

'It is an engagement, you know!' he said. He had a voice like silk and bold eyes. 'We really did make an engagement to come to Tietjens' house to-day . . . whenever it happened . . . a lot of us. In Rouen. Those who were in Number Two.'

Aranjuez said:

'The C.O.'s to be there. He's dying, you know. And it would be nothing without the Major. . . .'

She turned her back on him. She was crying because of the pleading tones of his voice and his small hands. Tietjens was coming down the stairs, mooning slowly.

II

Standing at the telephone Tietjens had recognized at once that this was a mother, pleading with infinite statesmanship for her daughter. There was no doubt about that. How could he continue to . . . to entertain designs on the daughter of this voice? . . . But he *did*. He couldn't. He did. He *couldn't*. He did. . . . You may expel Nature by pleading . . . *tamen usque recur*. . . . She must recline in his arms before midnight. Having cut her hair had made her face look longer. Infinitely attracting. Less downright: with a refinement. Melancholy! One must comfort.

There was nothing to answer to the mother on sentimental lines. He wanted Valentine Wannop enough to take her away. That was the overwhelming answer to Mrs Wannop's sophistications of the advanced writer of a past generation. It answered her then; still more it answered her now, today, when a man could stand up. Still, he could not overwhelm an elderly, distinguished and inaccurate lady! It is not done.

He took refuge in the recital of facts. Mrs Wannop, weakening her ground, asked:

'Isn't there any legal way out? Miss Wanostrocht tells me your wife . . .'

Tietjens answered:

'I can't divorce my wife. She's the mother of my child. I can't live with her, but I can't divorce her.'

Mrs Wannop took it lying down again, resuming her proper line. She said that he knew the circumstances and that if his conscience . . . And so on and so on. She believed, however, in arranging things quietly if it could be done. He was looking down mechanically, listening. He read that our client Mrs Tietjens of Groby-in-Cleveland requests us to inform you that after the late occurrences at a Base Camp in France she thinks it useless that you and she should contemplate a common life for the future. . . . He had contemplated that set of facts enough already.

Campion during his leave had taken up his quarters at Groby. He did not suppose that Sylvia had become his mistress. It was improbable in the extreme. Unthinkable! He had gone to Groby with Tietjens' sanction in order to sound his prospects as candidate for the Division. That is to say that, ten months ago, Tietjens had told the General that he might make Groby his headquarters as it had been for years. But, in that communication trench he had not told Tietjens that he had been at Groby. He had said 'London'. Specifically.

That *might* be an adulterer's guilty conscience, but it was more likely that he did not want Tietjens to know that he had been under Sylvia's influence. He had gone for Tietjens bald-headed, beyond all reason for a Commander-in-Chief speaking to a Battalion Commander. Of course he might have the wind up at being in the trenches and being kept waiting so near the area of a real *strafe* as he might well have taken that artillery lark to be. He might have let fly just to relieve his nerves. But it was more likely that Sylvia had bewildered his old brains into thinking that he, Tietjens, was such a villain that he ought not to be allowed to defile the face of the earth. Still less a trench under General Campion's control.

Campion had afterwards taken back his words very handsomely—with a sort of distant and lofty deprecation. He had even said that Tietjens had deserved a decoration, but that there were only a certain number of decorations now to be given and that he imagined that Tietjens would prefer it to be given to a man to whom it would be of more advantage. And he did not like to recommend for decoration an officer so closely connected with himself. He said this before members of his staff . . . Levin and some others. And he went on, rather pompously, that he was going to employ Tietjens on a very responsible and delicate duty. He had been asked by H.M. Government to put the charge over all enemy prisoners between Army H.Q. and the sea in charge of an officer of an exceptionally trustworthy nature,

of high social position and weight. In view of the enemy's complaints to the Hague of ill-treatment of prisoners.

So Tietjens had lost all chance of distinction, command pay, cheerfulness, or even equanimity. And all tangible proof that he had saved life under fire—if the clumsy mud-bath of his incompetence could be called saving life under fire. He could go on being discredited by Sylvia till kingdom come, with nothing to show on the other side but the uncreditable fact that he had been a gaoler. Clever old General! Admirable old godfather-in-law!

Tietjens astonished himself by saying to himself that if he had any proof that Campion had committed adultery with Sylvia he would kill him! Call him out and kill him. . . . That of course was absurd. You do not kill a General Officer commanding in chief an Army. And a good General too. His reorganization of that Army had been everything that was ship-shape and soldierly; his handling it in the subsequent fighting had been impeccably admirable. It was in fact the apotheosis of the Regular Soldier. That alone was a benefit to have conferred on the country. He had also contributed by his political action to forcing the single command on the Government. When he had gone to Groby he had let it be quite widely known that he was prepared to fight that Division of Cleveland on the political issue of single command or no single command—and to fight it in his absence in France. Sylvia no doubt would have run the campaign for him!

Well, that, and the arrival of the American troops in large quantities, had no doubt forced the hand of Downing Street. There could no longer have been any question of evacuating the Western Front. Those swine in their corridors were scotched. Campion was a good man. He was good—impeccable!—in his profession he had deserved well of his country. Yet, if Tietjens had had proof that he had committed adultery with his, Tietjens', wife he would call him out. Quite properly. In the eighteenth-century tradition for soldiers. The old fellow could not refuse. He was of eighteenth-century tradition too.

Mrs Wannop was informing him that she had had the news of Valentine's having gone to him from a Miss Wanostrocht. She had, she said, at first agreed that it was proper that Valentine should look after him if he were mad and destitute. But this Miss Wanostrocht had gone on to say that she had heard from Lady Macmaster that Tietjens and her daughter had had a liaison lasting for years. And . . . Mrs Wannop's voice hesitated . . . Valentine seemed to have announced to Miss Wanostrocht that she intended to live with Tietjens. 'Maritally', Miss Wanostrocht had expressed it.

It was the last word alone of Mrs Wannop's talk that came home to him. People would talk. About him. It was his fate. And hers. Their identities interested Mrs Wannop, as novelist. Novelists live on gossip. But it was all one to him.

The word 'Maritally!' burst out of the telephone like a blue light! That girl with the refined face, the hair cut longish, but revealing its thinner refinement. . . . That girl longed for him as he for her! The longing had refined her face. He must comfort. . . .

He was aware that for a long time, from below his feet a voice had been murmuring on and on. Always one voice. Who could Valentine find to talk or to listen to for so long? Old Macmaster was almost the only name that came to his mind. Macmaster would not harm her. He felt her being united to his by a current. He had always felt that her being was united to his by a current. This then was the day!

The war had made a man of him! It had coarsened him and hardened him. There was no other way to look at it. It had made him reach a point at which he would no longer stand unbearable things. At any rate from his equals! He counted Campion as his equal; few other people, of course. And what he wanted he was prepared to take. . . . What he had been before, God alone knew. A Younger Son? A Perpetual Second-in-Command? Who knew? But to-day the world changed. Feudalism was finished; its last vestiges

were gone. It held no place for him. He was going—he was damn well going!—to make a place in it for . . . A man could now stand up on a hill, so he and she could surely get into some hole together!

He said:

‘Oh, I’m not destitute, but I was penniless this morning. So I ran out and sold a cabinet to Sir John Robertson. The old fellow had offered me a hundred and forty pounds for it before the war. He would only pay forty to-day—because of the immorality of my character.’ Sylvia had completely got hold of the old collector. He went on: ‘The Armistice came too suddenly. I was determined to spend it with Valentine. I expected a cheque to-morrow. For some books I’ve sold. And Sir John was going down to the country. I had got into an old suit of *mufti* and I hadn’t a civilian hat.’ Reverberations came from the front door. He said earnestly:

‘Mrs Wannop. . . . If Valentine and I can, we will. . . . But to-day’s to-day! . . . If we can’t we can find a hole to get into. . . . I’ve heard of an antiquity shop near Bath. No special regularity of life is demanded of old furniture dealers. We should be quite happy! I have also been recommended to apply for a vice-consulate. In Toulon, I believe. I’m quite capable of taking a practical hold of life!’

The Department of Statistics would transfer him. All the Government Departments, staffed of course by non-combatants, were aching to transfer those who had served to any other old Department.

A great many voices came from below stairs. He could not leave Valentine to battle with a great number of voices. He said:

‘I’ve got to go!’ Mrs Wannop’s voice answered:

‘Yes, do. I’m very tired.’

He came mooning slowly down the stairs. He smiled. He exclaimed:

‘Come up, you fellows. There’s some Hooch for you!’ He had a royal aspect. An all-powerfulness. They pushed

past her and then past him on the stairs. They all ran up the stairs, even the man with the stick. The armless man shook hands with his left hand as he ran. They exclaimed enthusiasms. . . . On all celebrations it is proper for His Majesty's officers to exclaim and to run upstairs when whisky is mentioned. How much the more so to-day!

They were alone now in the hall, he on a level with her. He looked into her eyes. He smiled. He had never smiled at her before. They had always been such serious people. He said:

'We shall have to celebrate! But I'm not mad. I'm not destitute!' He had run out to get money to celebrate with her. He had meant to go and fetch her. To celebrate that day together.

She wanted to say: 'I am falling at your feet. My arms are embracing your knees!'

Actually she said:

'I suppose it is proper to celebrate together to-day!'

Her mother had made their union. For they looked at each other for a long time. What had happened to their eyes? It was as if they had been bathed in soothing fluid: they could look the one at the other. It was no longer the one looking and the other averting the eyes, in alternation. Her mother had spoken between them. They might never have spoken of themselves. In one heart-beat apiece whilst she had been speaking they had been made certain that their union had already lasted many years. . . . It was warm; their hearts beat quietly. They had already lived side by side for many years. They were quiet in a cavern. The Pompeian red bowed over them; the stairways whispered up and up. They would be alone together now. For ever!

She knew that he desired to say 'I hold you in my arms. My lips are on your forehead. Your breasts are being hurt by my chest!'

He said:

'Who have you got in the dining-room? It used to be the dining-room!'

Dreadful fear went through her. She said:

'A man called McKechnie. Don't go in!'

He went towards danger, mooning along. She would have caught at his sleeve, but Caesar's wife must be as brave as Caesar. Nevertheless she slipped in first. She had slipped passed him before at a hanging-stile. A Kentish kissing-gate. She said:

'Captain Tietjens is here!' She did not know whether he was a Captain or a Major. Some called him one, some another.

McKechnie looked merely grumbling: not homicidal. He grumbled:

'Look here, my bloody swine of an uncle, your pal, has had me dismissed from the army!'

Tietjens said:

'Chuck it. You know you've been demobilized to go to Asia Minor for the Government. Come and celebrate.' McKechnie had a dirty envelope. Tietjens said: 'Oh, yes. The sonnet. You can translate it under Valentine's inspection. She's the best Latinist in England!' He said: 'Captain McKechnie: Miss Wannop!'

McKechnie took her hand:

'It isn't fair if you're such a damn good Latinist as that . . .' he grumbled.

'You'll have to have a shave before you come out with us!' Tietjens said.

They three went up the stairs together, but they two were alone. They were going on their honeymoon journey. . . . The bride's going away! . . . She ought not to think such things. It was perhaps blasphemy. You go away in a neatly shining coupé with cockaded footmen!

He had re-arranged the room. He had positively re-arranged the room. He had removed the toilet-furnishings in green canvas: the camp bed—three officers on it—was against the wall. That was his thoughtfulness. He did not want these people to have it suggested that she slept with him there. . . . Why not? Aranjuez and the hostile thin lady sat on green canvas pillows on the dais. Bottles leaned

against each other on the green canvas table. They all held glasses. There were in all five of H.M. Officers. Where had they come from? There were also three mahogany chairs with green rep, sprung seats. Fat seats. Glasses were on the mantelshelf. The thin, hostile lady held a glass of dark red in an unaccustomed manner.

They all stood up and shouted:

'McKechnie! Good old McKechnie!' 'Hurray McKechnie!' 'McKechnie!' opening their mouths to the full extent and shouting with all their lungs. You could see that!

A swift pang of jealousy went through her.

McKechnie turned his face away. He said:

'The Pals! The old pals!' He had tears in his eyes.

A shouting officer sprang from the camp bed—her nuptial couch! Did she *like* to see three officers bouncing about on her nuptial couch. What an Alcestis! She sipped sweet port! It had been put into her hand by the soft, dark, armless major! The shouting officer slapped Tietjens violently on the back. The officer shouted:

'I've picked up a skirt. . . . A proper little bit of fluff, sir!'

Her jealousy was assuaged. Her lids felt cold. They had been wet for an instant or so: the moisture had cooled! It's salt of course! . . . She belonged to this unit! She was attached to him . . . for rations and discipline. So she was attached to it. Oh, happy day! Happy, happy day! . . . There was a song with words like that. She had never expected to see it. She had never expected. . . .

Little Aranjuez came up to her. His eyes were soft, like a deer's, his voice and hands caressing. . . . No, he had only one eye! Oh, dreadful! He said:

'You are the Major's dear friend. . . . He made a sonnet in two and a half minutes!' He meant to say that Tietjens had saved his life.

She said:

'Isn't he wonderful!' Why?

He said:

'He can do anything! Anything! . . . He ought to have been. . . .'

A gentlemanly officer with an eyeglass wandered in. . . . Of course they had left the front door open. He said with an exquisite voice:

'Hullo, Major! Hullo, Monty! . . . Hullo, the Pals!' and strolled to the mantelpiece to take a glass. They all yelled: 'Hullo, Duckfoot. . . . Hullo, Brassface!' He took his glass delicately and said: 'Here's to hoping! . . . The mess!'

Aranjuez said:

'Our only V.C. . . .' Swift jealousy went through her.

Aranjuez said:

'I say . . . that *he*. . . .' Good Boy! Dear Boy! Dear little brother! . . . Where was her own brother? Perhaps they were not going to be on terms any more! All around them the world was roaring. They were doing their best to make a little roaring unit there: the tide creeping into silent places!

The thin woman in black on the dais was looking at them. She drew her skirts together. Aranjuez had his little hands up as if he were going to lay them pleadingly on her breast. Why pleadingly? . . . Begging her to forget his hideous eye-socket. He said:

'Wasn't it splendid . . . wasn't it ripping of Nancy to marry me like this? . . . We shall all be such friends.'

The thin woman caught her eye. She seemed more than ever to draw her skirts away though she never moved. . . . That was because she, Valentine, was Tietjens' mistress. . . . There's a picture in the National Gallery called *Titian's Mistress*. . . . She passed perhaps with them all for having . . . The woman smiled at her: a painfully forced smile. For Armistice. . . . She, Valentine, was outside the pale. Except for holidays and days of National rejoicing. . . .

She felt . . . nakedish, at her left side. Sure enough Tietjens was gone. He had taken McKechnie to shave. The man with the eyeglass looked critically round the shouting room. He fixed her and bore towards her. He stood over, his legs wide apart. He said:

'Hullo! Who'd have thought of seeing *you* here? Met you at the Prinsep's. Friend of friend Hun's, aren't you?'

He said:

'Hullo, Aranjuez! Better?'

It was like a whale speaking to a shrimp: but still more like an uncle speaking to a favourite nephew! Aranjuez blushed with sheer pleasure. He faded away as if in awe before tremendous eminences. For him she too was an eminence. His life-hero's . . . woman!

The V.C. was in the mood to argue about politics. He always was. She had met him twice during evenings at friends' called Prinsep. She had not known him because of his eyeglasses: he must have put that up along with his ribbon. It took your breath away: like a drop of blood illuminated by a light that never was.

He said:

'They say you're receiving for Tietjens! Who'd have thought it? you a pro-German, and he such a sound Tory. Squire of Groby and all, eh what?'

He said:

'Know Groby?' He squinted through his glasses round the room. 'Looks like a mess this . . . Only needs the *Vie Parisienne* and the *Pink Un.* . . . Suppose he has moved his stuff to Groby. He'll be going to live at Groby, now. The war's over!'

He said:

'But you and old Tory Tietjens in the same room . . . By Jove the war's over. . . . The lion lying down with the lamb's nothing. . . .' he exclaimed 'Oh, damn! Oh, damn, damn, damn. . . . I say . . . I didn't mean it. . . . Don't cry. My dear little girl. My dear Miss Wannop. One of the best I always thought you. You don't suppose . . .'

She said:

'I'm crying because of Groby. . . . It's a day to cry on anyhow. . . . You're quite a good sort, really!'

He said:

'Thank you! Thank you! Drink some more port! He's a good fat old beggar, old Tietjens. A good officer!' He added: 'Drink a *lot* more port!'

He had been the most asinine, creaking, 'what about your king and country', shocked, outraged and speechless creature of all the many who for years had objected to her objecting to men being unable to stand up. . . . Now he was a rather kind brother!

They were all yelling.

'Good old Tietjens! Good old Fat Man! Pre-war Hooch! He'd be the one to get it.' No one like Fat Man Tietjens! He lounged at the door; easy; benevolent. In uniform now. That was better. An officer, yelling like an enraged Redskin, dealt him an immense blow behind the shoulder blades. He staggered, smiling, into the centre of the room. An officer pushed her into the centre of the room. She was against him. Khaki encircled them. They began to yell and to prance, joining hands. Others waved the bottles and smashed underfoot the glasses. Gipsies break glasses at their weddings. The bed was against the wall. She did not like the bed to be against the wall. It had been brushed by . . .

They were going round them: yelling in unison: 'Over here! Pom Pom! Over here! Pom Pom! That's the word, that's the word. Over here. . . .'

At least they weren't over there! They were prancing. The whole world round them was yelling and prancing round. They were the centre of unending roaring circles. The man with the eyeglass had stuck a half-crown in his other eye. He was well-meaning. A brother. She had a brother with the V.C. All in the family.

Tietjens was stretching out his two hands from the waist. It was incomprehensible. His right hand was behind her back, his left in her right hand. She was frightened. She was amazed. Did you ever! He was swaying slowly. The elephant! They were dancing! Aranjuez was hanging on to the tall woman like a kid on a telegraph pole. The officer who had said he had picked up a little bit of fluff . . . well, he had! He had run out and fetched it. It wore white

cotton gloves and a flowered hat. It said: 'Ow! Now!'. . . There was a fellow with a most beautiful voice. He led: better than a gramophone. Better. . . .

Les petites marionettes, font! font! font! . . .

On an elephant. A dear, meal-sack elephant. She was setting out on . . .





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